

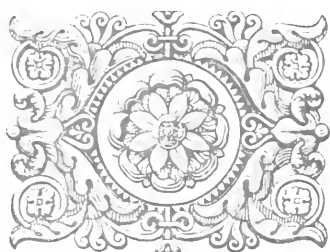
In the
West Country

Francis A. Knight



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
Brigham Young University

THE
ROY E. CHRISTENSEN
COLLECTION
OF VICTORIAN BOOKS



AT
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

Assembled by David Margee

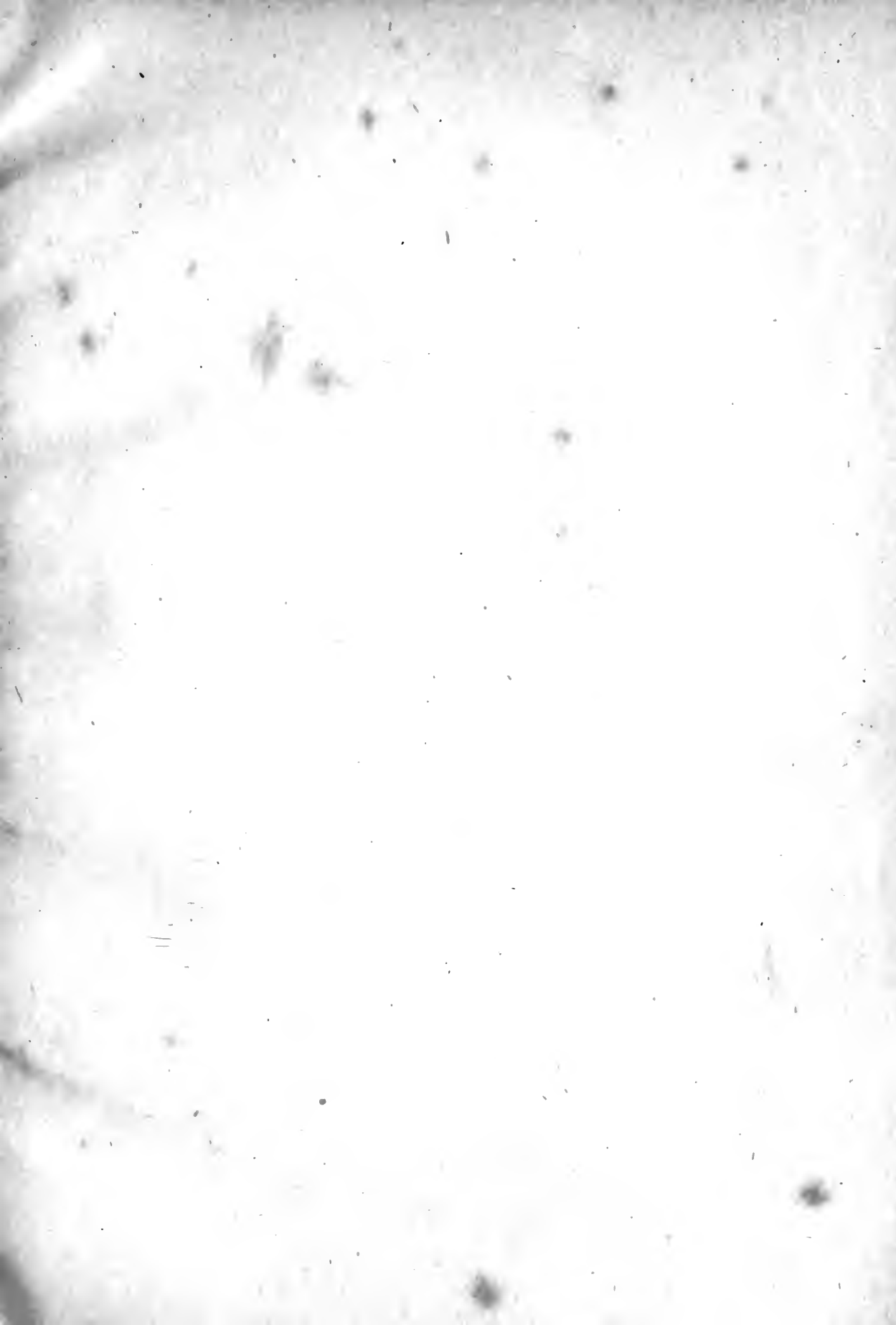
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY



3 1197 22902 7443

7142
2004
10/30

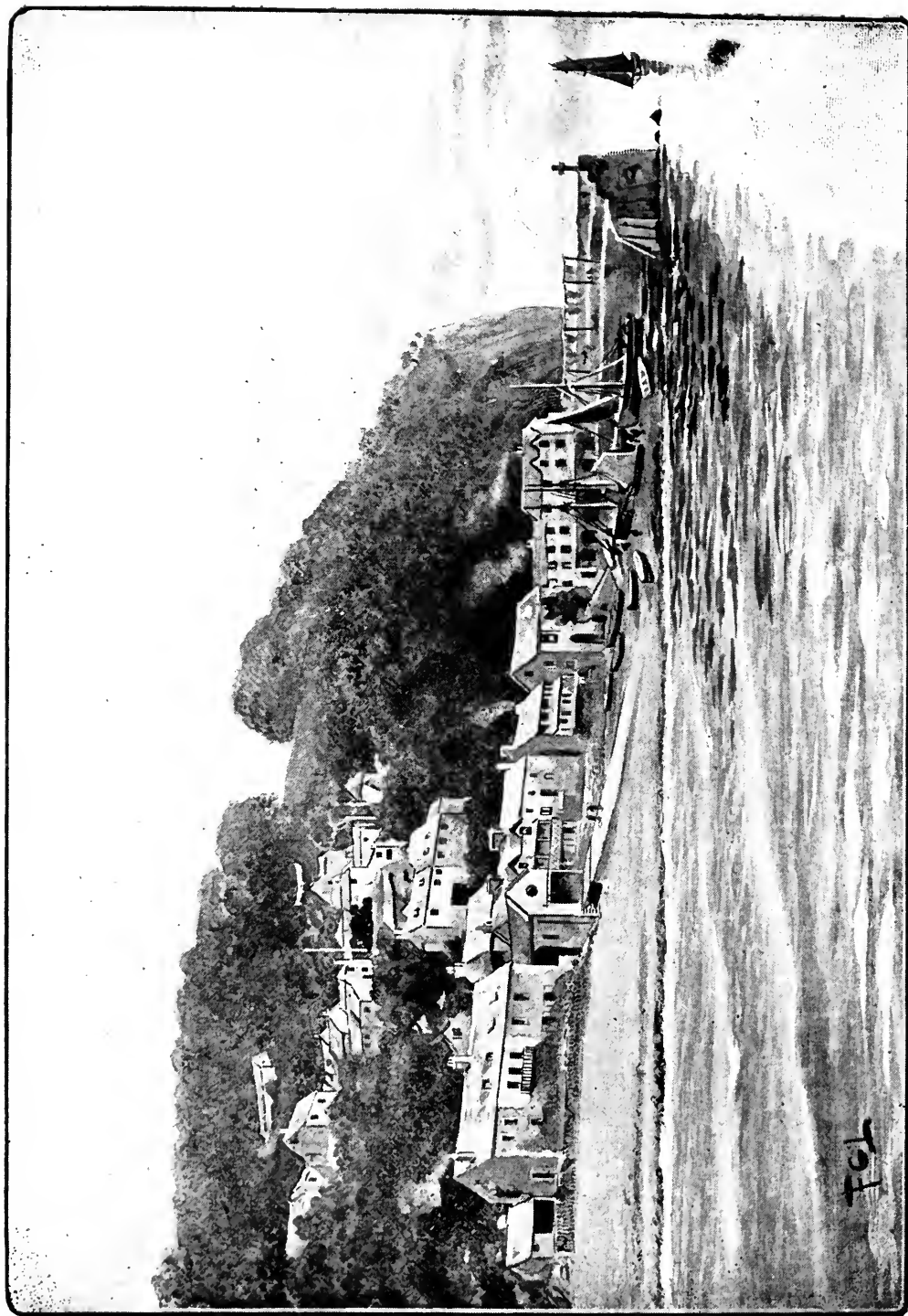
one of 50 volumes given
to the library
June 10 - 1897



IN THE WEST COUNTRY.

*This Edition de luxe consists
of 50 copies only, of which this
is No. 15*

F. A. Knight.



CLOVELLY FROM THE SEA.

FOL

In the West Country

BY

FRANCIS A. KNIGHT,

AUTHOR OF

"By Leafy Ways," "Rambles of a Dominic,"

"By Moorland and Sea,"

&c., &c.

ILLUSTRATED.

Bristol :

W. CROFTON HEMMONS, ST. STEPHEN STREET.

London :

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO., LTD.

These sketches are, with alterations and additions, reprinted from the "Daily News" and the "Speaker," by kind permission of the editors.

WITHOUT PERMISSION,
BUT WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE
TOO DEEP FOR WORDS,

These Pages are Dedicated

TO

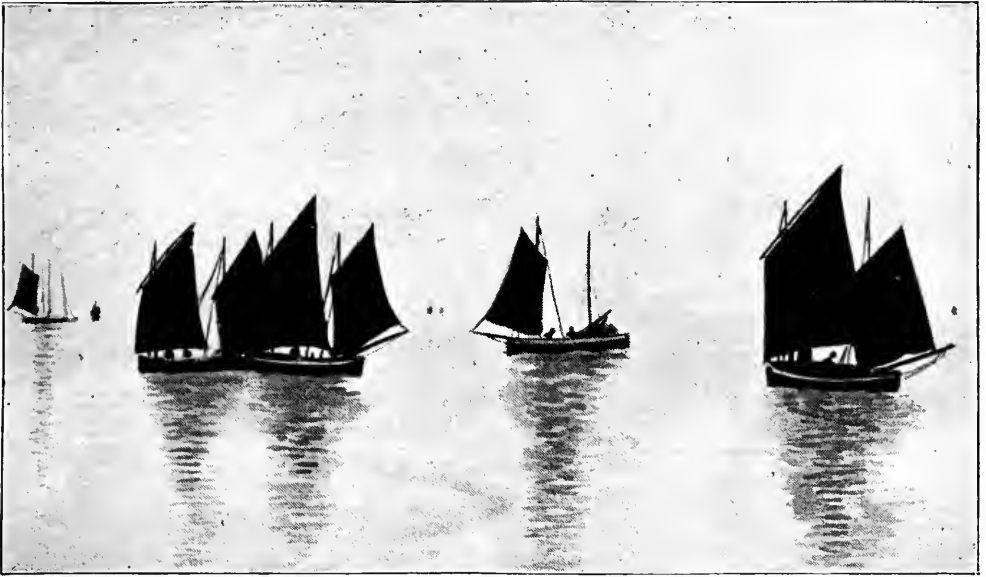
THE DEVOTED COMPANION
WHOSE RAMBLES WITH ME IN

The West Country

BEGAN NOW NEARLY

*. . . five and twenty years ago ;
Alas, but time escapes ! 'Tis even so."*

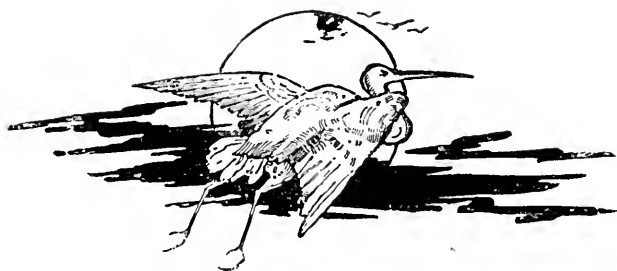
Printed at the Publisher's Works, St. Stephen Street, Bristol.



CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CLOVELLY: "WESTWARD HO!" COUNTRY ...	I
CLOVELLY: THE SOUND OF THE SEA	9
CLOVELLY: THE VIKINGS' SEAT	16
WESTWARD HO! AN OLD CARRONADE	25
DARTMOOR DAYS	36
EXMOOR—WYCHANGER: A FAR RETREAT ...	50
EXMOOR—LUCCOMBE: TWILIGHT IN THE HOLLOW	59
EXMOOR: HORNER WATER	67
EXMOOR: WHERE RED DEER HIDE	75

	PAGE
TORR STEPS: A MOORLAND RIVER	82
EXMOOR—WINSFORD: VOICES THREE	90
BREAN DOWN: FLOTSAM AND JETSAM	98
THE COUNTRY LIFE	114
HALE WELL: A QUIET CORNER	128
THE GREENWOOD TREE	146
CHILL OCTOBER	162
TURF MOOR: A HAPPY HUNTING GROUND ...	176
TURF MOOR: THE FROZEN MARSHES	188
WINSCOMBE: A CAMP OF REFUGE	196
WINSCOMBE: A MIDSUMMER MEADOW	204
WINSCOMBE: HARVEST HOME	213
THE MENDIPS—WINTERHEAD: AFTERMATH ...	222
WOODSPRING: A GREY OLD HOUSE BY THE SEA	235
KEWSTOKE: THE MONK'S STEPS	250
BY COACH TO TINTAGEL	258

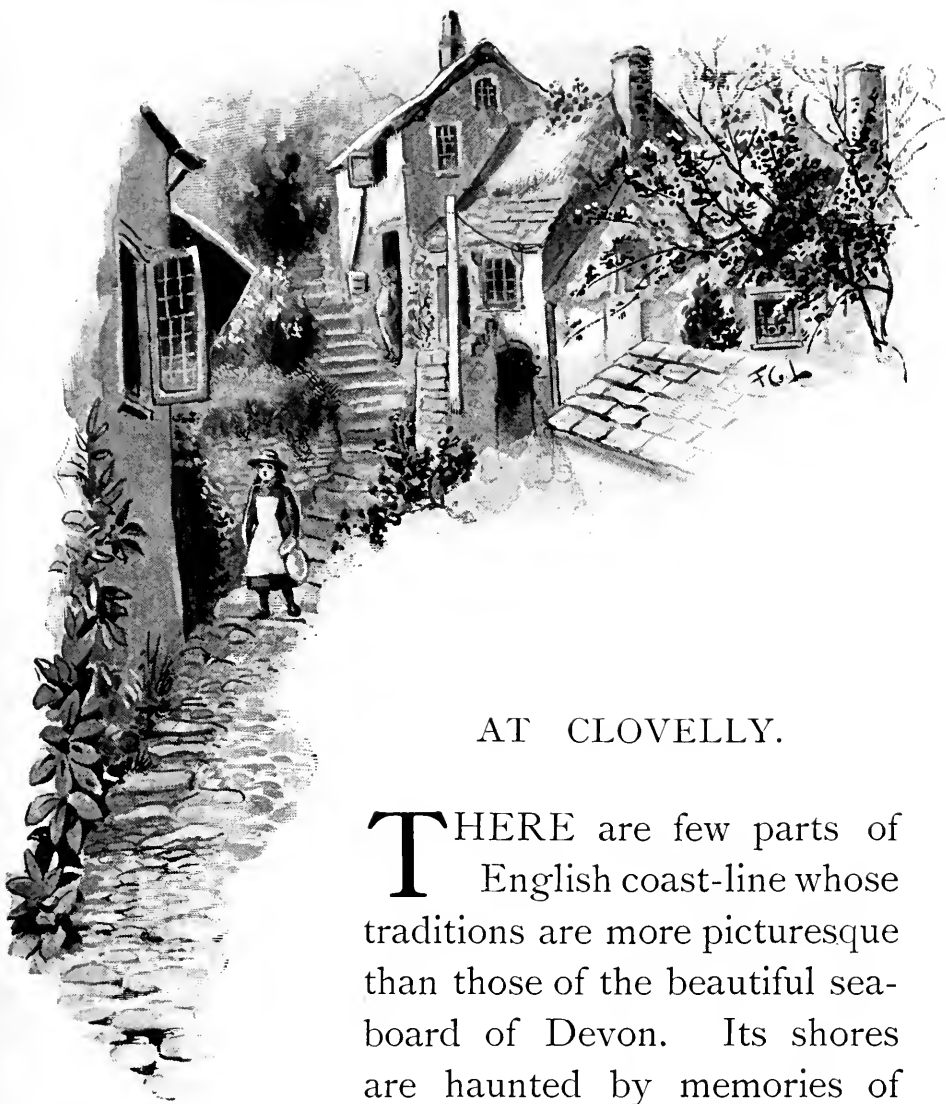


LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
CLOVELLY FROM THE SEA ... <i>(frontispiece).</i>	
CLOVELLY STREET	I
A ROCKY COAST	9
MOONLIGHT	16
OLD SAILOR AND CHILD <i>to face</i>	22
AN OLD CARRONADE	25
DARTMOOR: CHAGFORD	36
DARTMOOR—EVENING: TAKING HOME	
THE SHEEP <i>to face</i>	48
A WEST COUNTRY COTTAGE	50
THE OLD MILL: TWILIGHT	59
EXMOOR: HORNER BRIDGE	67
WHERE RED DEER HIDE	75
TORR STEPS	82
AN EXMOOR SKETCH	90

	PAGE
A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA	98
MOORLAND NEAR THE SEA	114
A WEST COUNTRY MOLE CATCHER <i>to face</i>	124
A QUIET CORNER	128
THE GREENWOOD TREE	146
THE HARVEST MOON	162
ON SEDGMOOR	176
WINTER IN THE MARSHES	188
WINSCOMBE—THE CHURCH PORCH	196
A MENDIP VILLAGE—WINSCOMBE ... <i>to face</i>	200
THE MOWERS	204
A WEST COUNTRY REAPER	213
COUNTRY LIFE	222
WINTERHEAD: AN UPLAND PASTURE <i>to face</i>	233
A GREY OLD HOUSE BY THE SEA	235
THE MONK'S RETREAT	250
TINTAGEL	258





AT CLOVELLY.

THERE are few parts of English coast-line whose traditions are more picturesque than those of the beautiful seaboard of Devon. Its shores are haunted by memories of the great Armada, of the deeds of Drake and Hawkins, of Howard and Raleigh, and of many another old sea-dog, who played his part in the making of our island story. It was the coast of Devonshire that was first harried by the Danes, when, in the words of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle,

“three ships of Northmen, out of Denmark,” put in to plunder Teignmouth. The other side of the county suffered most. Again and again the hamlets on the northern shore were wasted by the merciless invaders. The isle of Lundy, that from the land shows like a faint blue bar along the sky line, has a stirring story of its own. It has served in its time as a stronghold even of corsair Algerines. Pirates from Spain and Holland each held it in their turn. On the beach of its only landing place there still lies, buried in the shingle, an ancient gun that was hurled over the cliff by the French when they were about to leave the island. Its rightful lords themselves were, in the good old days, little better, probably, than buccaneers.

But there is a greater and more real interest linked with this pleasant shore. The memory that, before all others, haunts the coast of Devon is the memory of Charles Kingsley. The legends that have most charm for us here are from the pages of “Westward Ho !” If Bideford has regained nothing of its lost renown, Bideford that in Queen Bess’s time “was one of the chief ports in England . . . furnished seven ships to fight the Armada; and even

more than a century afterwards . . . sent more vessels to the northern trade than any port in England saving London and Topsham," we cannot forget that it was there that "Westward Ho!" was written. As we stroll along the streets of the little seaport that lies opposite, we are less likely to think of Hubba and his vikings than of how "the *Vengeance* slid over the Bar, passed the sleeping sandhills, and dropped anchor off Appledore with her flag floating half-mast high, for the corpse of Salvation Yeo was on board."

Kingsley's pictures of South American forests have fired the heart of many a reader, old as well as young, to see for himself the wonders of those enchanted regions, to gaze on a giant ceiba tree, like that on the green steeps above La Guayra, where "Parrots peeped in and out of every cranny, while, within the air of woodland, brilliant lizards basked like living gems upon the bark, gaudy finches flitted and chirruped, butterflies of every size and colour hovered over the topmost twigs, innumerable insects hummed from morn till eve; and, when the sun went down, tree-toads came out to snore and croak till dawn."

But those descriptions, marvellous as they are, were borrowed from books. It was not until fourteen years after that passage was written that "the dream of forty years" was fulfilled; that the author of "At Last" was able to see with his own eyes the West Indies and the Spanish Main; could, as he says, "compare books with facts, and judge for myself of the reported wonders of the earthly paradise." But it is quite another thing when he is talking of the coast of Devon. There his foot is on his native heath. He was not, it is true, born within sound of the sea, but some of his earliest memories were of Hartland and Welcombe, of Bideford and Clovelly. Above all of Clovelly. To use his wife's words, "His love for Clovelly was a passion." Even his well-loved Eversley had hardly a warmer place in his regard.

Kingsley was just eleven when his father became rector there, and for some six years he doubtless spent most of his holidays at least among the scenes which he describes so well. Thirteen years passed before he went back. "I cannot believe my eyes," he wrote to his wife; the same place, the pavement, the same dear old smells, the dear old handsome, loving faces

again.” The cottages are much the same as when last he saw them, now nearly fifty years ago, “with jessamine and fuchsia running up the windows.” Just the same as then is “the narrow paved cranny of a street, vanishing downwards, stair below stair.” Any change there is must be for the better. The village has been drained ; that is a substantial improvement, and the fuchsias and climbers have wreathed half the hamlet in a very bower of green. Clovelly Church—so far away that the sound of its bells never reaches the village in the cleft below—has few features of its own to recommend it. But the grey-haired sexton remembers how he sat with young Kingsley in the choir, sixty years since, when they were boys together. And the churchyard is to us like a chapter of romance. Half the names we know best in “Westward Ho!” are on its stones.

Here are two names that conjure up those “five desperate minutes” on the mountain road when the gold train was taken ; when the surviving Spaniards, “two only, who were behind the rest, happening to be in full armour, escaped without mortal wound, and fled down the hill again.” They were chased by “Michael Evans

and Simon Heard . . . two long and lean Clovelly men . . . who ran two feet for the Spaniards' one; and in ten minutes returned, having done their work." Another stone reminds us of "the armourer, who sat tinkering a head-piece," humming a ballad in honour of his birth-place. "'Tis Sunderland, John Squire, to the song, and not Bidevor," said his mate. "Well, Bidevor's as good as Sunderland any day, for all there's no say-coals there blacking a place about."

The names of Ebbsworthy and Parracombe recall that scene by the banks of the Meta, when Amyas went with Ayacanora in search of two of his men, who had taken to the forest, each with an Indian bride. It was Parracombe who asked only to be left "in peace, alone with God and God's woods, and the good wives that God has given us, to play a little like school children. It's long since I've had play-hours, and now I'll be a little child once more, with the flowers and the singing birds and the silver fishes in the stream that are at peace and think no harm, and want neither clothes, nor money, nor knighthood, nor peerage, but just take what comes."

Here are Yeo and Hamblyn. And if there are no Careys in the churchyard, they lie in

plenty in the church itself. Here, too, is a Passmore. "Lucy Passmore, the white witch to Welcombe. Don't you mind Lucy Passmore, as charmed your warts for you when you was a boy?" It is a far cry from Clovelly to the deep gorge of Welcombe: a good way even to Harty Point, with whose lesser altitude the crew of the *Rose* compared the towering heights above the mangrove swamps of Higuerote. But the place is close to the village where Frank and Amyas kept watch after that strange missive had been left at the Court by some "country fellow"—

"Mister Carey, be you wary
By deer park end to-night
Yf Irish ffoxes com out of rocks
Grip and hold hym tight "

We can stand there now and look out over just such a scene as Amyas saw when, "outside, the south-west wind blew fresh and strong, and the moonlight danced upon a thousand crests of foam; but within the black, jagged point which sheltered the town, the sea did but heave in long, oily swells of rolling silver, onward into the black shadow of the hills, within which town and pier lay invisible, save where a twinkling light gave token of some weary fisher's wife, watching the weary night through for the boat which would return with dawn."

The beech below, the “steep hillside fenced with oak wood,” are at least the same as in Kingsley’s time. And if the stout craft that he used to watch putting out from the pier have not outlived the gales of half a century, there are men on the fishing boats of to-day that remember him well. There are those in the village who recollect even his father, “a man who feared no danger, and could steer a boat, hoist and lower a sail, shoot a herring net, and haul a seine as one of themselves.” Who that stands looking seaward from the ancient quay, whose rude, unmortared masonry has weathered full five hundred winters, and watches the great green rollers thundering up the beach, but thinks of the bay as Kingsley saw it, “darkened with the grey columns of the waterspouts, stalking across the waves before the northern gale; and the tiny herring-boats fleeing from their nets right for the breakers, hoping more mercy even from those iron walls of rock than the pitiless, howling waste of spray behind them?” Yes, it is “Westward Ho!” country. Turn where we will—the bay, the cliffs, the woods, the village—all remind us of Amyas Leigh, of Will Carey, of Salvation Yeo.



THE SOUND OF THE SEA.

THE long curve of the shore on either side this little fishing port, guarded here by a mighty wall of cliff, here by steep faces of red rock, and bordered here with fields that come down nearly to the water's edge, is

fringed with a wide belt of shingle—no smooth stretch of yellow sand, but miles and miles of great grey pebbles, the ruins of old cliffs, the wreck of rocky battlements shattered by the surges, and rolled and shaped and rounded by the rude play of winds and waves. Down the long shore, headland beyond headland shows fainter

and more faint, until the shadowy outline of the land fades into the far horizon. Westward from the harbour, a long cliff towers above the shore, with strange curves and mighty buttresses, of endless shades of red and brown, its seaworn faces weathered to cool grey or stained to inky black, touched with the gold of clinging lichens and the bright green of tiny ferns. Along its ledges sturdy rowan trees are rooted, among thickets of gorse and bracken and heather. Higher up there hangs over the rocky brows a crown of dwarf oak trees, gnarled and storm-beaten.

At the foot of the vast wall, growing dim now as evening darkens, is a little space of shingle-covered beach, that at high water is altogether shut out from the world. When the tide is in there is no way in or out. If on the steep side of the cliff there are tracks up which a goat might clamber, yet round the points of rock that fence it in, against which now the waves are breaking, there will be no way for hours. For hours nor voice nor foot of man can break the quiet of this lonely spot. A single gull, rocking idly on the waves, over its double in the clear water under it, and one solitary cormorant standing erect and

motionless on a great rock that is almost as dark as he, deepen the sense of solitude. Solitude there is, but not silence. The warm air of the summer twilight is full of the sound of the sea—"low at times, and loud at times, and changing like a poet's rhymes;" and after each wave-beat on the storm-worn rocks the dark cliff overhead so flings back the answer that it seems as if

"From each cave and rocky fastness,
In its vastness,
Floats some fragment of a song "

The hour is late. The cliff grows cold and sombre. Darkness is settling in its cavernous hollows. The shadow of the shore steals slowly out over the pale green sea. Over the bay are scattered the fishing-boats of the port, still far off, but making for home towards the tiny quay that, from the shore below the village, stretches out its sheltering arm. Far out at sea, beyond the jagged line of tumbling waves against the sky, lies a great ocean highway, whose white sails and drifting smoke show faintly through the haze. Over the vast sea, here dark with shifting cloud-shadows, there still bright in the clear sunshine, are hues a painter might toil for in vain. Who could render the swift changes of colour that wind

and sun are weaving with their magical loom over the wide expanse? Here a band of pale, clear green stretches far across the bay; here a belt of soft amber; there a long stretch of rich, imperial purple, with endless interchange of brown and green and blue, ruffled with light flaws of wind, and touched at far intervals with white points of foam, as of waves that were fleeing from the rougher sea outside.

The art of man might copy to the life the curve of that great green wave, with scraps of seaweed showing darkly through its cool, transparent depths; but not the deftest hand that ever drew could give the low roar of the incoming roller, the sound of its plunge on the unyielding rock. The painter might imitate the snowy whiteness of the water beaten suddenly into foam, but not its seething hiss as it rushes in among the boulders, not the rattle of the pebbles as the wave draws back for its next plunge along the beach. He might show us the glisten of the wet stones, rounded and polished by the eternal chafing of the surges; he might make the white foam flicker in the black shadows under them, but not the sullen sound of boulders shaken to their stony roots by the resistless tide—boulders that on

rough nights of winter, when the lighthouse tower is veiled in storm-drift, and great waves are thundering on the bar, are hurled like play-things up and down the beach. The cormorant on the canvas might be to the full as stately and sombre as that dark figure yonder, brooding like some spirit of evil; but no shout could startle him to flight, driving him, with slow beat of his broad wings, to seek safety in some still more secluded resting-place. The clearest colours of the palette, the deftest touches of the brush, the highest ideal of the painter can give us but one glimpse of what after all is one unending change. His may be the ideal. This is the real, the restless, seething, stormy sea. What is the sea without its sound? As we gaze at the dumb fury of a painted storm—the fatal reef, the doomed ship, the white lash of the pitiless surges, it is to Fancy alone that we must look for

“ The sound of the trampling surf
On the rocks and the hard sea sand.”

But now the fishing-boats are coming in. Their brown sails, always so dear to the soul of the artist, have taken colour from the flaming west, and shine like fiery orange in the light of sunset. Their dark hulls are glistening with spray, the

white foam shines like silver underneath their bows. One after one they near the shore, and as they pass into the shadow of the cliff the silver melts from the hissing foam below them, the borrowed colour fades slowly from their sails, that, as each craft reaches her moorings, rattle down, mere heaps of sombre, sea-beaten canvas. Boats are putting out from the shore to bring in the fish. Groups of idlers and fishing-folk gather on the quay. For the moment the hum of voices rises louder through the narrow street of the little town, half hidden now in the darkness of the hollow—the little town that is like no other in the islands.

“ ‘Tis a stairway, not a street.
That ascends the deep ravine.”

The sun is down. Far off across the bay the lighthouse has mounted guard over the bar,—the very bar over which

“ Three fishers went sailing away to the west,
Away to the west as the sun went down.”

Now silence begins to settle on the village. The bearded vikings are gone from the seat where, night after night, they spin the same old yarns; where night after night the wayfarer over-hears scraps of seafaring talk—of prodigious hauls of

fish, of hairbreadth escapes, of trawlers that, fleeing from a storm, were caught on the very threshold and dashed to flinders on the quay.

A sound of the sea is in it all. And when the last group of idlers has broken up, when the clatter of the last belated footsteps has died away up the little, unlighted, stony street, and the hush of night is brooding on this quaint old village, the song of the sea grows louder still. Now through the quiet air comes faintly up the cry of some wandering plover, the muttered croak of a solitary heron. All night the little town is full of voices of the sea—

“The grand, majestic symphonies of ocean.”



THE VIKINGS' SEAT.

HALF way down the one street of this “little wood-embosomed fishing town—a steep stair of houses clinging to the cliff,” as Kingsley calls it, is one of the few level spaces that break the otherwise abrupt descent. No better place could have been chosen for a seat, for no point in all the village commands so wide a view of the sea. There is no place so good as this for watching the trawlers putting out, hauled slowly to the head of the quay, and then spreading their great brown mainsails,—double-

reefed of late, for there is mostly a stiff breeze outside the bay. On the left, in front of one of the prettiest of many pretty houses in the village, half covered with a bower of creepers, is a low wall, on which, when their day's work is done, the sailors and the old sea captains gather for their nightly gossip. Below are groups of cottages, scattered in picturesque confusion, with ancient roofs of crumbling slate, and quaint old gables, all wreathed in creepers and honeysuckle and tall fuchsias. Lower still is the old quay, five centuries old, with brown fishing nets hung up to dry, and with a half-score or so of trawlers moored to old corroded guns embedded in the masonry, their tall masts swaying idly on the long swell that now, at high tide, fills the little harbour. The fishermen are still busy over their gear. When all is stowed they will make their way up here, to the wall yonder, or to this bench, to talk over the doings of the day. Here the old captains, grey-headed, storm-beaten sea kings, sit, night after night, and spin over and over their well-worn yarns. There is not so much in their speech of

“ : the magic charm of foreign lands,
With shadows of palms, and shining sands ; ”

not so much of the high seas,

“Of ships dismasted, that were hailed,
And sent no answer back again,”

as of disasters nearer home, of some mishap among the boats.

It is always the boats. The talk is ever and ever the same—of spars carried away, of split mainsails, of the failure of the fishing. A few days since the trawlers put out with a fair wind and a smooth sea. The trawls were not yet down when clouds swept off the land, the air was darkened by a great rush of rain, and a sudden storm, with heavy squalls of wind, broke over the boats. One by one the brown sails disappeared. On the quay stood a group of anxious figures vainly endeavouring to peer through the storm. When the weather cleared it was seen that one of the boats was in trouble. A squall had laid her on her beam ends, and she shipped a heavy sea. The men had given themselves up for lost, for no help could have got to them in time, even had their plight been seen; when, happily for them, the bowsprit carried away, some of the strain was taken off, and the boat righted. All next day her skipper was strolling idly on the quay, like a man dazed; and as you pass the Vikings' Seat in the

evening, or indeed any little knot of sailors, you will still hear scraps of the story.

The gravestones round the church on the hill are evidence enough of the risks they run that go down to the sea in ships. More eloquent still are the tales of the old fishermen :—how, for instance, in one great storm, now “five-and-fifty years ago,” as they put it, twenty-one men from this port were drowned in the bay, within sight of land. Still farther back, “a matter of one-and-seventy years ago,” no fewer than thirty-two were lost; and the whole population of the port is even now not much over two hundred. Of such great disasters the churchyard has few records. So strong are the currents in the bay that bodies are seldom recovered. Some of the stones are only in memory of those whose rest remains unknown—not here, but somewhere in the stormy sea.

Every son of the village is a fisherman born. Every man has been a sailor almost since he could remember anything. Few as are the inhabitants of the place, twenty of them are captains on the high seas, or, having spent their lives in battling with the storm, have put in for the last time to spend in this harbour of refuge

their few remaining days. These are the men of the old school, who, from childhood to old age, have kept green the memory of their native village, always cherishing the hope

“ their long vexations past,
Here to return, and die at home at last.”

The modern captain is a more prosperous man. He knows more of the world. He is not content with the narrow street, the tiny rooms, the small affairs of this awkward out-of-the-way corner. His home will be at some larger port. In twenty years there will be few of the old race of sea captains left to rule the conclaves round the Vikings' Seat.

They are a kindly race, those West Country fishermen. Kingsley's eulogies of his beloved Devon folk were never more deserved than here, never were more true than now:—a warm-hearted, honest, pleasant-spoken race, gentle and courteous, yet free and independent as ever. A fine old figure is that venerable, white-headed, white-bearded mariner, whose memories go back over eighty years of seafaring life. He is never tired of the story of a sailor of this village, who, returning home in a gold-ship, was cast away on Norfolk Island—then entirely uninhabited—

together with his wife and a handful of the crew. The men saved nothing from the wreck but one precious lucifer match, parent of all the fires they had in many dreary years. Some of the party, in despair, put off in a boat, but nothing was ever known as to their fate. Years passed before a sealing brig put in and took off the few survivors. The portrait of the castaway and his wife, in their rude dress of skins, sewn with bone needles of their own making, is still shewn in the village—he, with lifted hand, as if pointing to the long-looked-for sail; she, with a bright look of joy upon her pretty face.

The white-haired sailor, for all his eighty years of sailing, has never been out of sight of land; but that tall, grizzled sea captain standing yonder has been round the Horn more times than he can well reckon up. After forty years he came home, with every intention of getting another ship, feeling that nothing could ever part him from the sea. But the years have passed, and still he lingers in the village. Nothing now could tempt him from the shore. Of all the wonders of his forty years' experience, none seems to have burnt itself so deep into his memory as a night in the tropics, in a perfect calm, on a smooth and oily

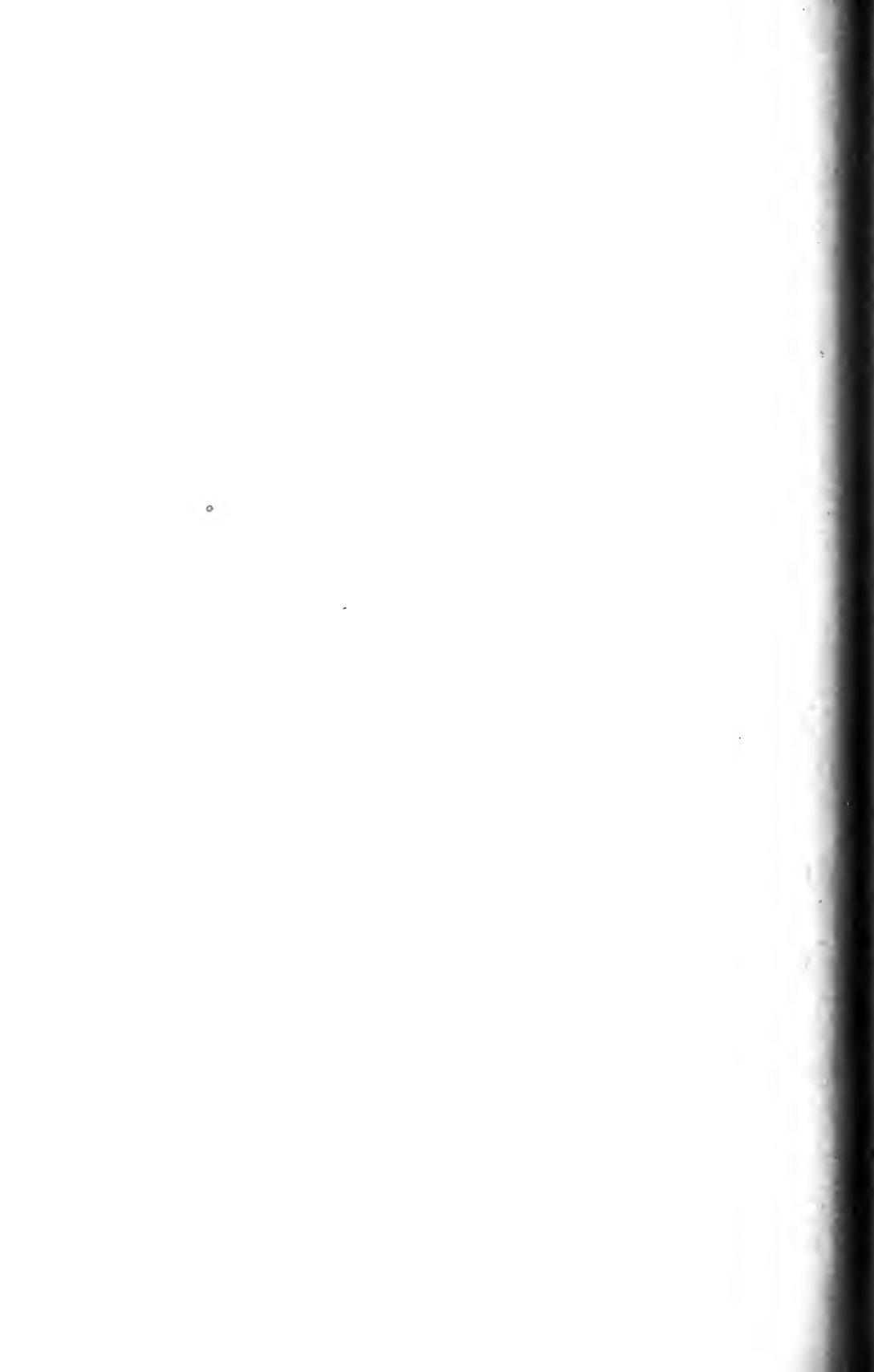
sea, in which all the stars were copied with such perfect clearness that, as he puts it, "you would almost think there really was another world, and that you were in it."

In a doorway hard by, festooned after the manner of the place with creepers and tall fuchsias, is a picture for an artist. At the threshold there sits, on the brick-floor, the grandfather, an old, sunburnt, sea-beaten fisherman, nursing a fair-haired, rosy-cheeked youngster, who laughs and crows and struggles to escape the old man's careful arm, bent on setting off alone on a voyage of discovery down the stony slope. Behind them, framed in the darkness of the room beyond, stands the mother, looking on well pleased.

What have the years in store for that young fisherman? Will his grave be here? Will days that are coming see one more stone set up in memory of a sailor lost at sea? Perhaps not. As one of the old captains says, "Boys don't take to the sea now. Going to be artists. Learn to draw and all manner of things." In his time "the schoolmaster was a very different sort from now. He had to be a schoolmaster, land-measurer, pig-killer, all in one. You paid three halfpence a



OLD SAILOR AND CHILD.



week for learning to read, three halfpence more for learning to write, and then you went to sea. Boys all went to sea at twelve. They had their choice—work or starve.” Sailors of his day had rarely even as much schooling as that. He had never, he said, courted but one woman in his life, and that was for another man. He had had so much trouble reading and writing other folks’ love-letters that he never had the heart to try it for himself.

Round the Vikings’ Seat the children of the village are playing. Hard by, on a tiny stretch of level ground, half-a-dozen boys are intent on some running game—nautical little figures in regulation jerseys; sea boots too, some of them. Where will they be in twenty years? If they are not to man the trawlers of the future there is all the more chance that they will be scattered. If they are not to be fishermen, there is no room for them here. Here there is nothing but the fishing.

And the girls? These laughing, sunny, bright-eyed little flowers of Devon, absorbed in an old-world country game, singing as they play—

“How many miles to London town?

Three score ten.

Shall us get there by candle light?

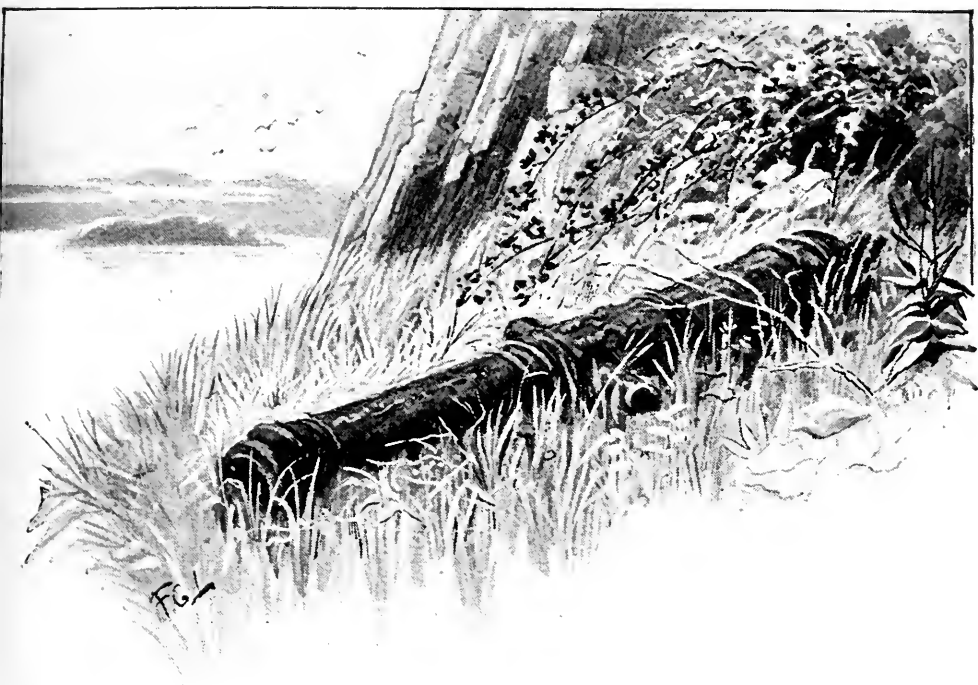
Oh yes, if your legs are long and straight.”

What of the girls? Below there, sleeping in the twilight, is the sea, the cruel, treacherous, hungry sea, destined but too surely to darken the sunshine of their simple lives. That small figure now, that dainty little golden-haired darling, for her what have the years in store? In days to be will she

“ start from her slumber
When gusts shake the door? ”

Will she make her way against the storm, some winter's night, down to the little quay, and peer with wild eyes through the rain and the spray, amid a roar of wind and surge, and of great waves thundering on the bar, hoping against hope for the home-coming of the *Madcap* or the *Village Girl*? What would you? It is an old story, and

“ . . . men must work and women must weep,
Though the harbour bar be moaning.”



AN OLD CARRONADE.

HALF-BURIED in the soft turf that clothes the rocky brows of a low headland in the West there lies an ancient carronade. It is a quiet spot. There is no sound save the lap of the tide along the shore, the stir of the wind in the long grass, the cry of a sea-gull wheeling over, or now and then the sharp clamour of a troop of daws that flutter round their harbour in the cliff. About it grow great tufts of sea-pink, whose

flowers, save here and there a belated bloom or two, have long since gone to seed. But in summer the air is sweetened by the breath of thyme and crowfoot, and at times, from the rocky steeps below, comes the strange smell of blossoming samphire. There is no mark on the old gun. The rust of years has eaten deep into its battered metal. No date remains, no royal cipher. But there is a tradition that it was recovered from the wreck of a Spanish warship that, in the flight of the Armada, went to pieces on this rock-bound coast. In the face of the cliff, a few hundred yards to the westward, there were found embedded, many years ago, some corroded cannon-balls that once might have fitted such a gun as this, but surrounded by so thick a coat of rust that they were increased to nearly four times their original calibre. The gun has at any rate seen some hard fighting. It has been spiked. Some part at least it has played in our rough island story, whether on pirate or privateer, or on one of the unwieldy galleons of the Great Armada. But as it lies here now, deep sunk in its green rest, it is a very emblem of peace and of disarmament.

The tide is at the full, almost "too full for

sound or foam;" yet along the broad beach
below,

" where the sand like silver shines,
Flows the long, monotonous cadence of its unrhymed lyric lines."

And round the rocky bases of the little island
yonder—once, so tradition says, a Viking strong-
hold—there is the low fret of pale green waves.
Beyond the island stretches away to the horizon a
vast sweep of sea, smooth, unbroken; an expanse
of vivid blue, more brilliant than the brightest
sapphire. But

"When descends on the Atlantic
The gigantic
Storm-wind of the equinox,"

then the huge green rollers come charging up
this narrow strait, and thunder in the caverns of
the cliff, whirling great flakes of foam a hundred
feet into the air. They are gentle waves that
lap to-day against the rocky wall. But there
is no stormier sea when, on rough nights of
winter,

"The wild winds lift it in their grasp,
And hold it up, and shake it like a fleece."

A few brown-sailed luggers are cruising in the
bay,—mackerel fishing perhaps. The pilchards

have deserted this coast altogether. Some of the men say that the constant passing of steamers has disturbed them. Others declare "there have been no pilchards since the new parson came, and there'll be none till he's turned his back on the parish."

On the verge of the next headland, a rampart of grey cliff that stands out towards the open Atlantic, are two great grave mounds, mere flaws on the horizon's edge, piled over the ashes of some long-forgotten warriors. There is a legend here that, at midnight, two kings in golden armour rise from these green barrows, and fight on the short sward of the downs until the lighthouse on the far point

" . . . shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his ineffectual fire."

Then the old sea-kings turn back to their rest, to lie till nightfall, each

"Arched over with a mound of grass,
Two handfuls of white dust shut in an urn of brass."

On a ledge of rock below the barrows, a pair of ravens build. Year after year their brood is reared in safety, beyond the reach even of the most venturesome of climbers. The old birds patrol the cliff for miles, like wandering spirits of

two wreckers, condemned to haunt for ever the scene of their ill deeds. Here they come now, sailing slowly along on their broad wings, the sunshine glancing on their glossy plumage. They go sweeping by, uttering at times a crooning sound, not a croak at all, a soft, low note, with no touch of harshness in it. Gracefully they wheel and soar and glide, now turning over in the air, now poising like a pair of kestrels. Below them, crouching on the hot sand of the beach that skirts the bases of the cliff, a flock of gulls are resting, like heaps of foam left stranded by the tide. They do not shrink as the dark figures pass over. There are no eggs to plunder from the rocks; no young broods to harry; and a full-grown herring gull will show fight even to a raven.

It is a noble wall of cliff that guards this sandy fringe of the Atlantic; now light, now dark; here bare and weathered and windswept, there overgrown with sea-pink and samphire; and here again worn into deep clefts and cavernous hollows, which, when this old gun was new, were thorns in the side of the Preventive men. No shore in England has seen more smuggling than this. Many a contraband cargo has been

landed at the little village at the head of the creek. It is whispered that more than one family of standing here owes its rise to well-planned "runs" of silk and spirits and tobacco. In the side of the Witan Stone—a grey old Menhir that was old in Roman times—there is still pointed out a hole called the "Gauger's Pocket," into which a bag of gold was dropped when a "run" was coming off, with due notice to the exciseman to go and look for it, and then to keep well in the background. It was quite an open ceremony. "Please, sir," a smuggler would say to the officer, "please, sir, your pocket's unbuttoned." "Aye, aye," was the answer, "but I shan't lose my money for all that."

Those days are not so long ago. It is not really many years since the clergyman who tells that story entered on that cure in the West Country which, to use his own words "was a mixed multitude of smugglers, wreckers, and dissenters," who still held that to shoot the gauger was not only a venial but a meritorious deed. When a man was hanged for murdering one of those hated representatives of law and order, his death was regarded as a piece of flagrant injustice, a crime in the eyes of Heaven itself;

the very grass, it was triumphantly pointed out, refusing to grow upon his grave.

Those were days when the prosperity of a sea-board farm depended less on its scanty grazing and its sterile corn-land than on its ill-gotten harvest of the sea. They were all in it. Even a parson has been known to hold the lantern while the spirit kegs were hauled safely through the surf. And once, when a wreck came ashore in church time, and the congregation had with one accord rushed out of doors, the vicar stopped them on their way to the sea. "Brethren," he shouted, "I have but five words more to say." Then walking deliberately to the front, and taking off his surplice, he said: "Now, let us start fair."

This is a terrible coast. There are villages where half the gardens are decorated with figure-heads of lost ships, where the churchyards are strewn with sorrowful memorials of men, known or nameless, whose lifeless bodies have been given up by the sea. It is not long since corpses that were washed ashore were buried with scant ceremony just above high-water mark. But of recent years these wasted relics of mortality have been treated with more reverence, and in some

villages it has become a custom to use figure-heads of wrecked vessels as memorials of the dead. In one place the white effigy of an armed warrior guards the grave of thirteen sailors, whose bodies the sea had laid upon the shore. In another graveyard the stern of a ship's boat has been set up over the remains of ten seamen "who were drifted on shore in a boat, frozen to death, at Beacon Cove, in this parish," one Sunday in December, now nearly fifty years ago. The rock-bound coast is as perilous as ever, but the days have gone when the shipwrecked mariner was dashed ashore alive only to meet his death from enemies more relentless than the waves. It was the height of rashness in the good old wrecking times to rescue a drowning man:—

"Save a stranger from the sea,
And he'll turn your enemy."

In our time, at any rate, no shipwrecked sailor would meet with anything but kindness at the hands of Englishmen. The real race of wreckers has died out—that is to say, the cold-blooded wretches who would lure a ship ashore, and then murder the crew by way of precaution before proceeding to plunder the cargo. But the spirit of plunder at least is not dead. Coastguardsmen

and agents of insurance companies know only too well how cleverly the Cornish fishermen even of to-day, though ready to lend willing hands in salving, and though fairly well paid for it too, contrive to appropriate stray things that take their fancy. It is not long since a large ship went ashore at the Lizard, and finally ground herself to pieces on the rocks. The closest watch was kept by the agents and preventive men, but next spring a perfect epidemic of musical instruments broke out in every village in the district, proving audibly enough that the light-fingered wreckers had been at their tricks all the time. How it is done the rambler in the West Country, who can use his eyes and ears, will soon discover; will agree too, with the remark made the other day in a Western village, that people who talked of wrecking as a thing of the past knew very little about it.

“You see, sir,” said a weather-beaten fisherman, “a great deal drifts out of a wreck, and although there are salvage men always on the watch, there’s many a cask and bale that’s picked up by our boats. One man with a long pair of tongs and another with a water-telescope can make a good thing of it between them. There was an

Italian steamer, now, that went ashore at Mullion. She was full of fruit and wine and all sorts of things—enough for everybody. There was great cases of champagne lying about, and the word went round among our men that it was ‘real’ pain, with no ‘sham’ to it, for when we did knock the tops of the bottles off, the wine all went out at one spurt, and we couldn’t get a drop. But at last we got corkscrews, and then we was happy. Well, I had a cask of sherry wine out of her,” he went on, “and I got it safe in by the back way, and you see I’ve a coastguardsman living on each side of me. But, law bless you, sir! they be just the same as we. . . . Oh, yes, sir, everything is supposed to be given up, but everything isn’t, not by a good way. And when we risk our lives to save the cargo, who has a better right to a share of it than we?”

He was near the *Mosel*, he said, when she ran full speed upon the rocks, and the sound of it was like a thousand tons of cliff falling into the sea, and such shrieks as never were heard. . . . Might he have stopped her? Well, perhaps he might. But a mate of his who put out at the risk of his life, and warned a big liner that was too close in shore—she was backed off and saved—

never got so much as a word of thanks, let alone any reward, for saving her. "Another man," he went on, "warned a steamer from his boat, and, as I'm a living man, they tried to swamp him for fear the captain should be blamed for his bad sailing. No, sir, we'll never do nothing to risk life, but if we can't get fair pay for saving a ship, we'll get fair share by helping ourselves." . . . Might anything be kept that was picked up? Oh yes, pieces of timber below a certain length. He was pressed further as to how the particular length was settled. "Well," he said slowly, "we do keep a saw in our boat."



DARTMOOR DAYS.

THE dwellers in the picturesque homesteads scattered at wide intervals over this countryside would hardly be content to hear these hills of theirs called a wilderness. But up yonder against the sky line, with grey clouds trailing low along its topmost ridges, is a brow of the wildest wilderness in England, and these hillside pastures are the fringe of Dartmoor. One might well imagine, too, looking out over this beautiful

landscape, that the lines of these West Country yeomen were fallen to them in pleasant places. And, indeed, fortunes have been made here in the "good old days," when bread was dear and wages were at starvation point. But times are hard. And there are sons of the soil here now working for hire on other farms, whose sires held broad acres of their own.

The wayfarer who, making his way up from Chagford towards the moorland, should chance to pass this little settlement, might well pause in wonder as he passed the gate, and stand and rub his eyes in doubt whether it was a dream or not. So unlike the old country is this log hut and all about it that a settler from the Bush might, if he saw it, almost fancy himself upon his native heath. The very trees that flourish here are strange. Among shrubs that have been brought from the slopes of the Himalaya, grow tall bamboos whose feathery crowns look over the topmost ridges of the roof. And yet on every hand there are suggestions of the moorland—those stacks of peat, with their picturesque coverings of furze and straw; that granite roller, so thickly set with crystals of felspar. The very props of the clothes-line are untrimmed birch poles from the wood, wearing

still their silvery bark. It is moorland earth that made those rhododendron thickets so broad and strong. It is moorland air that has draped the trees with shaggy lichens, adding centuries of age to oaks yet hardly in their prime, and lending to the sturdy fruit bushes of the borders the air of hoary patriarchs. Furze bushes, in whose thorny depths the yellow-hammers build in springtime, and willow-warblers weave their domes of grass, flourish in the garden precincts. And all the banks are overgrown with a green jungle of fern and broom and bilberry—children of the moorland, stealing down to regain their lost dominions.

This is winter by the calendar. But it is a day of clear shining after rain. The air is full of the sound of streams—of the roar of moorland torrents, of the deeper voice of the river plunging through the wooded gorge below. The stems of the tall birches in the wood below the house, still wet with last night's rain, shine as if they were sheathed in silver, and their branches glitter as if every twig were hung with silver beads—as, indeed, they are, the silver of the clinging raindrops.

A graceful, yellow-breasted wagtail, still lingering here when the rest of her kindred are across the sea, flutters down now and then from

the top of the dovecot to catch the flies that are sunning themselves against the wall. On the roof above the pigeons sit in conclave, their slumbrous voices just in keeping with the music of the streams. In his cage against the wall of the hut I can hear, now and then, a raven stirring. He is a silent bird for the most part :

“ He speaketh not ; and yet there lies
A conversation in his eyes —
The golden silence of the Greek,
The gravest wisdom of the wise,
As if he could, but would not speak.”

Some day he will talk, and then perhaps we shall learn what strange things he has been hoarding in the dark places of his memory. Again and again last night he woke me by rattling the bars of his prison, or by sharpening that great bill of his against his perch. I doubt if he slept a wink before daylight. It was strange to hear him thus in the darkness. At times, too, I heard the mellow voices of the owls, sounding clear above the rush of the streams and the patter of rain upon the roof.

Birds pass and repass now in the sunlight. At times the pigeons sweep down from their rest overhead, with sudden clatter of wings, and as they wheel round the house they rouse into

speech for a moment the taciturn jackdaw, whose cage adjoins the prison of the yet more silent raven.

From far up the moorland sounds the hoarse clamour of crows. And magpies go by, carefully keeping clear of the precincts, as if they were aware that the Master of the House had a keen eye and a steady hand. But they might lay aside their fears. No beast or bird is vermin in this corner of Arcadia. No jay or magpie ever suffered here the penalty of evil deeds or tarnished reputation. One night the Master of the House was roused by the sounds of a slight scuffle outside. An owl had swooped on a rat in a corner of the verandah, and through the wooden wall of the hut was plainly heard the rustle of feathers as the bird spread its broad wings over the body of its victim. Weasels find sanctuary under the very flooring of the shanty, and stoats may hunt the covers at their will without fear of trap or gun. The Hunt know well that there is no surer spot to find a fox than the larch plantations up yonder on the hill. And there, too, the badgers pursue in safety the even tenour of their harmless lives.

When the larches were first planted, and were but just struggling to get their heads above the

hillside jungle, grasshopper-warblers hid their nests on the ground among them, and chats, and tree-pipits. A few years later blackbirds came and built among the branches. Now the ring-doves trust their frail platforms of stick to the strong young arms. And in a year or two sparrow-hawks and magpies will build in the green tops. The trees have already killed the grass about their feet, and the bare earth beneath their shadow is a favourite haunt of the woodcock.

But in spite of crows and magpies, stoats and weasels, and all the creatures of the wild that are too often branded as vermin, there is no want of pheasants in the cover. And the Master of the House, with his man behind him, and three eager little terriers dancing at his heels, has but this moment left me to look for a woodcock. The dogs are much keener for the sport than their owner, master of woodcraft though he be. He is always readier to use his field-glass than his gun. Many a time, as he stood motionless, gun in hand, has a rabbit cantering by paused to look up at him, or a woodcock settled near, and come and gone unharmed. The moor-folk here are sportsmen born, with the keenest eyes for the whereabouts of hare or pheasant, and far too much given to the

setting of gins. The Master of the House—who says that half the pheasants he shoots have already lost a leg—showed me yesterday an illustrated price-list of the traps made by a man who boasts of supplying the Queen and the Prince of Wales, and who reckons in his long list of noble patrons not a few distinguished names that we have been accustomed to think of as belonging to champions of the “brute” creation. Yet here were not only rat-traps and rabbit-traps, traps for foxes and even for tigers, but traps—of horrible device, and certain to inflict the most cruel tortures—for killing hawks and herons. Surely, if some keepers are still ignorant and brutal, better things might have been expected of their masters. And his must be a mean and sordid soul who would grudge the kingfisher his meed of beauty—even supposing that so rare a bird can do any appreciable amount of harm. Yet in this list of fiendish enginry is figured a kingfisher-trap. This the purchaser is directed “to screw to a stump in the water where the birds resort, and place a piece of wood on the fork for them to alight on, or a small fish may be used as bait.”

In the last few days, when from other parts of the island have come reports of bitter weather,

of rough winds and frosty airs, the climate here has been almost summer-like. Yesterday, as I sat in the verandah, more than one wasp, roused by the sunshine from her winter slumber, was buzzing among the rafters overhead. But, as the day wore on, there were signs of a change. Ominous-looking clouds began to gather up from the southward. And, in the late afternoon, as we rode slowly up the steep track towards the moor, there came now and then a spurt of wind and rain.

The road, like so many of the Dartmoor roads, was fenced by rude walls of granite, built of blocks so ponderous as to suggest that only giants could have reared such cyclopean masonry. Every chink between the stones was fringed with fern and bilberry. Clinging lichens made the grey faces of the granite greyer still; while others, nestling in mossy hollows, were tipped with scarlet, recalling the vivid touches of colour over the eyes of a moorfowl.

High up on the moorland, looking down on one of the most beautiful of its many river valleys, we came on a great stone circle. known to the moor men as the Roundy Pound—a double ring of unhewn, irregular blocks of granite, shaggy with

ages' growth of lichens, and with a single thorn tree standing in the midst, mantled from base to crest with grey—a hoary patriarch, like the lone priest of long-forgotten rites. Far below lay the valley of the Teign, winding away into the hills. To the right rose the sad-coloured slopes of the moorland, here darkened with dead bracken, and there brightened by pale sheets of withered grass. On the left was a birch wood, with a rare purple bloom upon its leafless boughs, like the purple of far hills at sunset. Here and there a dead birch stem glimmered white against the dark. And about the feet of the bare trees was a wealth of colour almost more marvellous still—the rich brown, lustrous velvet of mosses and dead leaves, the fiery red of withered brake fern, beaten down by wind and rain. Below the wood, on a little island in the river, was a group of old Scotch firs, with the water gleaming white between the ruddy branches. Over all there stretched away the far-reaching wastes of the moorland, lifeless, desolate, with a fringe of mist along the sky line.

Night closed in grey and wet. As the hours passed, I woke at times to hear the rush of the rain, the growing sounds of multitudinous streams, the deepening voice of the river roaring through

its wooded passes. Morning broke on a day of undoubted Dartmoor weather—no gleam of sunshine anywhere; cold, clinging mists on every hand; grey sheets of rain stalking like ghosts across the landscape.

The day was at its very worst when the keeper, who had been at work since daylight rescuing trout that, in struggling up the swollen streams, had got themselves into difficulties in unexpected shallows, came up to the house and stood for a minute in the rain, the water streaming from every outlying point in his figure, and looked inquiringly at the Master of the House. The Master groaned. But he threw on his old shooting-coat, picked up a handful of cartridges, and took his gun from the corner, and the two men sallied out into the rain.

It was, in truth, a dreary morning. There was no sunshine now to light the dripping birch stems. But even under that grey sky there was marvellous beauty in the bare boughs, in the brown oak leaves, in the streaming ferns on the green bank below. Under the bank was a new gleam of silver, where the swollen brook went swirling by under a grey brow of granite. Hour after hour fell the pitiless rain. Every thread of

water on the hillside was a headlong torrent. The road below the house was deep under a rushing flood.

It was late when the little shooting party came back, their coming heralded by the screaming of a troop of jays that apparently kept pace with them as they plodded through the underwood. But the birds were not inveighing against the sportsmen. When my friend returned, he told me that as he passed under a pollard oak an owl flew out, almost brushing him with its wings. The jays, who were hanging about among the thickets on the edge of the wood, espied it in a moment. And, raising a hue and cry that was caught up by every finch and tit and blackbird within hearing, they chased the bewildered bird from tree to tree, scolding and storming, and buffeting it with their wings. Earlier in the afternoon a rabbit passed, unnoticed by the dogs, not running, but leaping, across the wood; and close at its heels a weasel, following in hot pursuit.

The rain was slackening a little as we turned into the hut. But a heavy fog was closing in from the moor, blotting out even the near woodland with its wall of grey. Pleasant, indeed, after the mist and the rain was the glow of

lamplight. And pleasanter still the glow of roaring oak logs, as we sat that night, each with a terrier on his knee, before the great wood fire. The dogs have taken kindly to the casual stranger, and one of them in particular is fond of sitting by me on a chair at meal times, resting her head on my arm in the most engaging manner. The two are on the best of terms for the most part, but a little attention paid to one is apt to lead to trouble with the other. I am told that there is sometimes a good deal of jealousy shown in the retrieving of a rabbit—a circumstance which, as may readily be guessed, does not tend to improve the condition of the game. And the slippers which we threw to distant corners of the hut for the dogs to bring back to us suffered severely in the bringing.

As we sat by the fire I heard something of the dangers of the moor, and of the reality of getting lost at night or in a Dartmoor fog. The oldest hand, said the Master of the House, would be helpless in such a fog as now lay round the house. A good plan, he added, is to follow a stream if you are fortunate enough to find one. Sooner or later you are sure to come to a house. He himself was on the moor once, with two companions, far away from any path, when a dense mist came on.

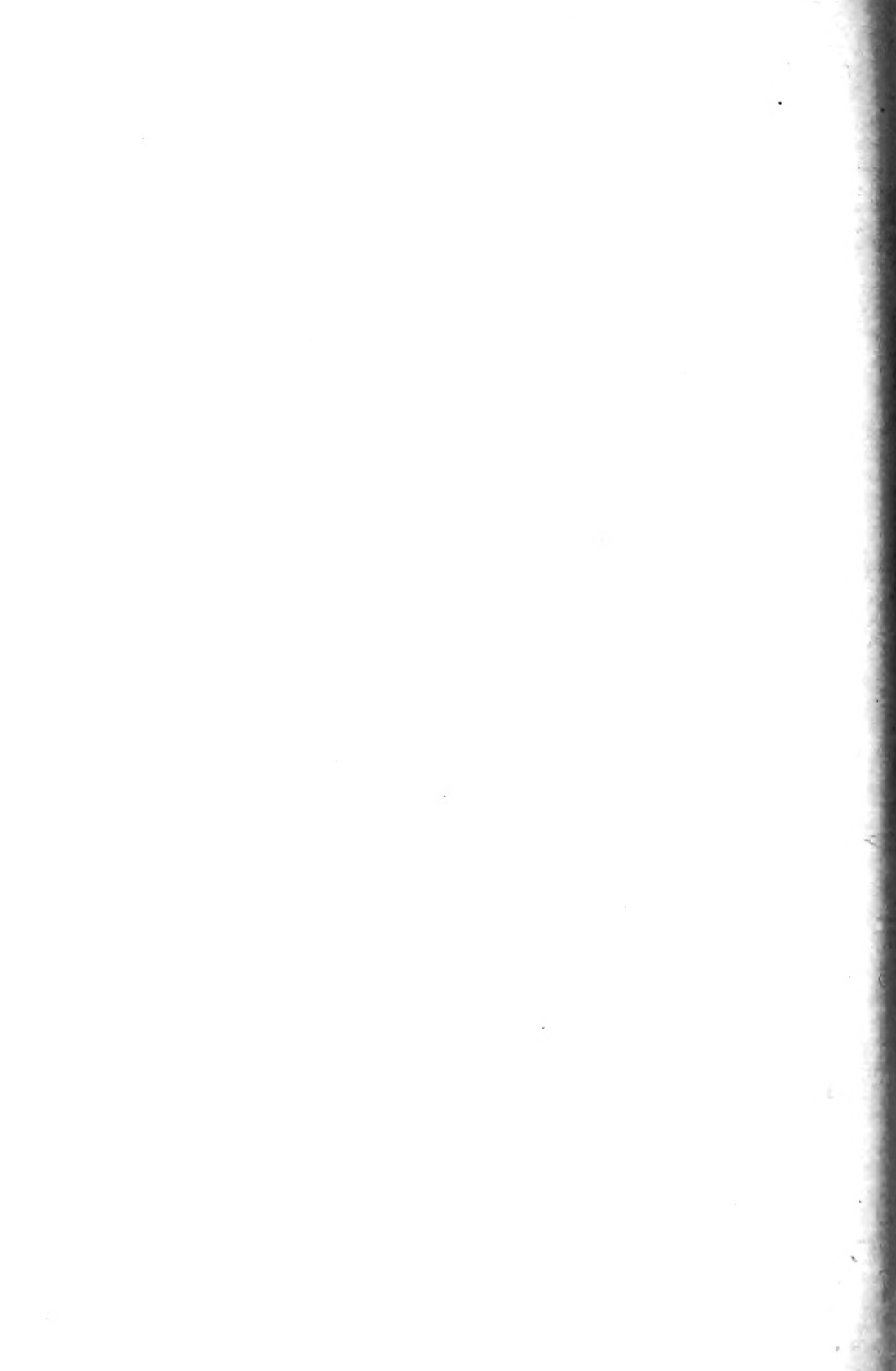
After long walking, he happened, by great good fortune, on the wall that bounded his own common, and came at length to a familiar gate that he knew was only half a mile from home.

The three wanderers drew a breath of relief. They were all right now. The haunting fear of having to pass a night upon the moor, as many a lost wayfarer has done, was forgotten in a moment. With confident steps they marched through the mist straight down the slope towards this bungalow. But after going steadily for three hours, with a gradually growing conviction that something after all must be wrong, they found themselves back at the same wall, and at the very identical gate. They had been walking in a circle—an experience only too familiar to travellers who have lost their way in the desert. They now followed the wall until it turned abruptly down the hill. My friend then walked close to it, while the others kept abreast of him, at a distance of a hundred yards or so, that they might avoid a bog which skirted the enclosure. In this way, shouting to each other now and then, they reached here in safety, not having seen each other since they parted company.

Another man, well known in the district—a man



DARTMOOR—EVENING: TAKING HOME THE SHEEP.



who rather prides himself on his acquaintance with Dartmoor—will not soon be allowed to forget how he set off on horseback one day in the mist, taking a short cut across the moor, by which he expected in half an hour to strike the Princetown road, and how, after an hour and a half of pretty hard riding, he too, found himself at the spot from which he had started.



WYCHANGER: A FAR RETREAT.

ON the northern edge of Exmoor, parted from the outer world by a long ridge of wooded hills that die away into a bold headland by the grey sea, there lies a spacious valley—fair even for the West Country, a valley that for its beauty of broad fields and noble trees and old-world villages, may rank among the fairest in all England. The traveller by the well-kept coach

road that passes along the foot of the hills, almost from end to end of it, looking across its green meadows and its red corn-lands to the deer-haunted heights of Dunkerry, sees something of its beauty, of its picturesque cottages, its wooded slopes, its rich pasture lands; may even catch a glimpse in passing of that old mill that, with its pointed gables, its rambling outbuildings, its rude bridges, and its

“Dark wheel that toils amid the hurry
And rushing of the flume,”

is like an artist's dream.

He who fares through on foot will know more of its charm, but even he is hardly likely to discover the best of its lovely lanes, deep set under over-arching hedgerows, the oldest and most magnificent of its trees, the most picturesque and retiring of its cottages. While hidden behind a rampart of low hills on the very skirts of Dunkerry, the most beautiful village of all, an ideal West Country hamlet, will escape him altogether:—a village in a nest of hills, with brown gables all embowered in green. By the church, whose grey tower rises in the midst, two poplars stand, their young leaves trembling in the sunshine, their tall forms just swaying in the wind.

The old manor house, whose traditions go back beyond the days of the Armada, seems to stand at the very limit of the world. So near the wilderness is it that the creatures of the wild, the birds, the beasts, share with man the possession of its barns and outbuildings. Its lawns, its thick-growing bays and laurels, its broad eaves, the masonry of its old walls are haunted by innumerable birds.

In the early morning, an hour or more before the sunrise, the whole air about the house is filled with sweet sounds, with the sunny ripple of the goldfinch's song, with the mingled chorus of thrush and blackbird, of wrens and robins and warblers, with the call of the cuckoo, the pipe of the wryneck, the croon of doves among the larches on the hill. At times, from far up the moorland comes down even the strange cry of a buzzard, or the croak of a wandering raven. All day the garden is full of pleasant sounds and sweet suggestions of the woodland, of the hushed whispers of swift moorland streams, of the stir of winds among the restless pines.

Even after sundown life is still stirring. Long after the mists of evening have begun to gather on the darkening hills the cuckoo calls. The

musical halloo of wandering owls breaks in through the vespers of the blackbird, and the shrill challenge of the black-cock sounds loud on the fringe of the moorland. Instead of the swallows, that all day float singing round the eaves, the bats come out of hiding in old barns and ruinous outbuildings, and flutter on silent wings through vacant windows.

In the twilight even the wild red deer stray down from their fastness to the very precincts of the garden. It is not long since, in the hind-hunting time, the "tufters" broke away after a stag and followed it, in spite of all the efforts of the huntsmen, far across the moor and down into the lowland. And, when at length the hounds were beaten off, two sheep-dogs from the village took up the chase and drove the stag up here to the Manor House. There it stood for hours in a narrow passage near the stables, showing a bold front to its pursuers, and undismayed by the curious villagers who came thronging up to gaze at it—a noble beast, with all its honours. Someone at length opened the door of an empty stable, and the stag walked quietly in. Tired out with the long chase over the slopes of Dunkery, it stayed in its strange asylum two days and nights,

entirely unmoved by efforts to dislodge it, but lowering its antlers in a moment if one of its visitors made an attempt to cross the threshold; though when one of the men, thinking it had gone, went into the stable after dark and actually brushed against it, the stag, happily for him, took no notice. The door was left open; the noble beast was free to go when it would. On the third morning the stable was empty; the strange guest had gone. A line of footprints across the lawn to the fence that parts the garden from the paddock, and up the long meadow towards the hanger, showed how it had made its way back unmolested to its haunt upon the moor.

Guests almost as strange are two wild ducks that built a nest in a pool in the field below the house. The eggs were hatched not many days since, and the young brood were caught and given in charge to a hen, who, so far, has proved herself but an indifferent foster-mother. The drake, after the manner of his kind, has another mate, and she is still sitting on her eggs on a small island in another pond near by. And he and the mother of the lost family still linger about the farm. You may see them flying past the windows on their way down from one of the

moorland streams, or watch them in the meadow by the empty nest. Or you may even chance upon them among the outbuildings, the drake a little way in advance, walking slowly forward, looking this way and that, pausing now and then at some strange sound; while his sober-tinted mate follows meekly a yard or so behind him. Now they stand doubtful, uncertain whether or no it is safe to enter the precincts. At length they venture in. Now walk quietly after them. There they stand, a gallant pair, he splendid with the rich green velvet of his glossy head, the white ring about his neck, the dark chocolate of his breast, his brilliant orange legs, and all the exquisite shades of grey upon his beautiful back: she with quiet plumage, streaked and mottled with soft tones of brown, looking for all the world like a dry heap of reeds and withered sedges. In a moment they are aware of danger. They move closer together. The drake utters a low warning call, nodding his head, slowly at first, then faster and faster until, with a loud note the two birds spread their beautiful wings, wheel round the house, and sail down to their old haunt by the pool.

By the same pool, not fifty yards from the road, there is another nest—a moorhen's; and if

you creep quietly up you may see the old bird on her nest of rushes under the bank, her dark figure looking little more than a patch of shadow in the heart of the bramble bush that overhangs her home. Her, too, you may watch in the early mornings wading among the long grass of the meadow, or you may even catch a glimpse of her as she paddles fast across the pool, keeping time with her glossy head to the rapid movement of her feet.

Hood has told us how, in his "Haunted House,"

"A wren had built within the porch, she found
The quiet loneliness so sure and thorough."

It is almost more strange that here a pair of chaffinches have made a sanctuary of this porch, and have built their nest just over the door, within arm's reach of every passer-by. It is an exquisite work of art, whose moss and lichen, felted with cobwebs and fine strands of wool fitted deftly on the curve of a level larch pole, and woven among the young shoots of the climbing rose tree, whose leaves hang down as if to hide it, might have escaped notice altogether were it not that the little builders are busy all day upon the grass before the windows, now taking short

flights among the laurels or the branches of the old arbutus, or the great bay tree that overhangs the lawn, scenting all the air with its abundant bloom, and that now and then they fly up to their nest over the doorway.

A far retreat—a spot in which the lover of nature would only too gladly settle down, content, amid this gracious scenery and these pleasant sights and sounds, to end his days in one of the little old-world cottages of “the sweetest village in the world,” with their tiny windows, their quaint gables, their roofs of russet thatch. A far retreat, upon whose dreamlike quiet no ripple of unrest could surely enter.

We can hardly realise that it was a lord of this very manor who, though long past his three score years and ten, held a fortress for King Charles until the last extremity, marching out at length with all the honours of war.

It is stranger still that a marble tablet on the chancel wall of the old church records how a rector of this peaceful parish left his charge and followed his master to the war; how he raised a troop of horse for the King's service; how four of his sons were captains in the Royal army; and how he himself, after Worcester's

Crowning Fight, went with the second Charles across the sea, giving up all, with a devotion worthy of a better cause, for a prince whom the clearer vision of our time justly brands as “immoral, dishonourable, and contemptible.”



LUCCOMBE: TWILIGHT IN THE HOLLOW.

ROUND the old mill that stands like a drowsy sentinel at the gate of the valley, quiet reigns. Silenced is the plash of the wheel; hushed the low rumble of the rude machinery. Through the rich grass of the meadow by the stream the red cattle are trooping home in answer to the milking call. The sun, already sunk below the fringe of woodland on the hill, shows like a fiery cloud through the dark lattice work of branches. Light still lingers on the steep slope

across the glen, on tawny grass and golden furze, and on points of grey rock that here and there break through the short turf. There is sunshine still upon the dark tops of the highest ridge of pines, and there are lines of silver on the branches of a giant oak whose crest towers far above his fellows. But here in the hollow the mist of evening gathers. All along the stream are drawn grey lines of vapour that, in the far recesses of the valley, deepen to a shadowy gloom.

The birds, with whose notes the whole glen was ringing, grow silent one by one. Their brief vesper hour is almost over. The hush of night is settling on the woodland. Far up the slope there still sounds the clear whistle of a blackbird. A thrush, too, is singing, as if moved to rivalry. His is a song less wild and thrilling, less powerful and passionate, yet a masterpiece of melody. Still through the deepening shadows rings the clear treble of the robin, and through all, like a whisper of peace, one hears the slumbrous voices of the doves.

Two cuckoos are still calling; one near at hand, whose loud notes, clear and mellow, seem to linger among the trees, dying slowly, like music in the roof of a cathedral. Another, more distant, answers him. They keep such perfect time that

Luccombe: Twilight in the Hollow. 61

the stronger voice overpowers half the answer, and, for the most part three notes alone are audible, the last one faint and low, and like a soft refrain :

Cuckoo ! Cuckoo !

Cuckoo !

The cuckoo's life is like that of no other bird that flies. There are no household cares for him; no nest to build, no eggs to warm, no brood to forage for. His sole business seems but to call his own name all day among the tree tops. It is a beautiful sound. And yet there are times when the cuckoo, as much as any bandit of the air, any crow, or sparrow-hawk, or prowling magpie, breaks the peace of the sylvan solitude. He may call all day if he will, without let or hindrance, or the least attempt at interruption. The birds pay little heed to him, save now and then in an idle moment to mob him and jeer at and hustle him, as they love to do to an owl, who by some mischance has sallied out into the daylight.

But the moment his mate is suspected of designs on the nest of some defenceless hedge-sparrow, or robin, or wagtail, with an eye to finding foster parents for her own discarded offspring, the whole neighbourhood is up in arms. A few days since a cuckoo, who had evidently set her heart on a

robin's nest in the thick growth of ivy round the chimney of one of the houses in the village, alighted in the top of a tall aspen that overlooked the spot. She settled on the roof of the house to reconnoitre. She even perched on the ledge of the garret window to get a better view. And all the while she was followed by an excited mob of redstarts, wagtails, and robins, scolding, storming, chattering. Sometimes, as if dismayed by their persistent clamour, the cuckoo made a half circuit of the garden, diving in and out among the bushes, swooping down to avoid the attack of some pursuer more importunate than the rest, and uttering now and then a strange, inarticulate cry, as if—which is likely enough—she were carrying in her mouth the egg she wanted to leave in the robin's nest. She gave it up at last, plunging down into a great bay tree, seeking in its thick-growing foliage some respite from pursuit.

The darkness deepens. But there is still light enough to follow the deer-path among the trees, whose thick carpeting of brown dry pine-needles is soft as velvet to the feet. It is not yet too dark to see the black-cock that gets up from the bilberry jungle by the path, or the wood pigeons that, when you pause beneath their

Luccombe: Twilight in the Hollow. 63

roosting place, go crashing out from the branches overhead. You can still watch the two squirrels that chase each other round the stem of a giant ash tree; can follow them, when, startled from their frolic, they take a short cut homeward through the larch-tops. They leap from the firm footing of one tree to the drooping bough beyond, and when it goes down, down beneath them like a blade of grass, they go on, without a moment's pause, towards their nest in the heart of the wood. So few wayfarers disturb the quiet here—or else the brown woodlanders have had such scant experience of the ways of man, of his love of capture and annexation—that the squirrels have not thought it worth while to build their stronghold high among the trees. It is not twenty feet from the ground. It is like a great wren's nest, a ball of moss, thick and closely felted, and marvellously laced round and round with long pliant larch twigs, and with only the least trace of an entrance at the side.

A flock of swifts are careering down the glen, like a troop of noisy revellers; their wild chorus sounding shrill and clear in the deepening hush of night. They wheel, with loud rustle of keen wings, and dash upwards towards the moor.

Again that swift career along the grass-grown road; again that wild exultant scream, so fierce, so beautiful. Deride it if you will. Call it hoarse, discordant, savage. It is a victorious pæan, a song of triumph, an exultant chorus proclaiming the empire of the air.

The dark forms vanish; the wild notes die away. It is the last sound of daylight.

“Far away, some belfry chime
Breathes a prayer across the moors.”

The last sound of daylight. The children of the night are abroad. White moths, painted boldly on the shadows, flit by like phantoms. Ghost-like, too, is the soundless flutter of a bat that, by the dark archway of the old bridge, chases the insects that hover on the stream. The long, low, monotonous call of the grasshopper-warbler among the furze bushes on the edge of the wood, is a strange sound;—the voice of a cricket, one might think, and not of a bird at all. Strange, too, is the droning note of a nightjar, rising and falling as if the bird, wheeling this way and that, were chasing moths among the trees. The bats have voices, though their flight is soundless, and their faint shrill cries grow in the stillness louder and more clear. At intervals an owl hoots, startling from their half

Luccombe: Twilight in the Hollow. 65

sleep the drowsy birds among the thickets over which he passes, so that one may follow his flight by the clamour he leaves behind him. Among the trees there sounds at times the crash of a belated ring-dove, settling down for the night, followed by a murmur of soft love notes, an answering whisper, and then silence.

Yet the air is full of faint, indistinguishable sounds, the opening of leaves perhaps, the patter of spent petals, the fall of pine needles, and the movements of night-wandering creatures. And to every sound the darkness lends a touch of mystery. Fancy could paint almost anything of strange and startling among the black shadows of the wood. You stop, almost in terror, when a pheasant rises, under your very feet, with a great rush of wings, and vanishes into the gloom. A blackbird, flying over unseen, sounds his loud alarm in passing, ringing, musical, metallic, like the throbbing string of some wild instrument.

There is another sound, the sound as of some large animal moving heavily among the thickets near the stream, with now and then a crash of branches. The noise draws nearer. Some red deer are making their way down to the water. The light wind is blowing straight

this way. There is nothing to warn them. The leader pauses, not five yards away, fetlock deep in the soft green morass along one of the small streams that vein the hill. His shape is dark and indistinct, yet there is just light enough to see that he has antlers still. Behind him is a troop of hinds, a mingled mass of stately, slow-moving, shadowy figures, leisurely crashing through the thickets. One strolls idly this way, closer still, pausing to browse on the leaves of the very willow that spreads its long boughs overhead. Another follows, and another. There are ten of them, at least, and not one aware of danger. Like Ajax, one longs for daylight. Yet daylight must have revealed the ambush. They are passing on. Another moment and they will have taken the alarm. Stand up and shout. What headlong rush, what wild stampede, what thunder of swift hoofs, what gallop of flying feet. Away they go, crashing through the underwood, up the slope, into the black, impenetrable shadows—sanctuary as safe as the very densest covert of the forest.



HORNER WATER.

THE man who knows Exmoor only in the pride of its summer beauty, who has, it may be, followed the staghounds over its far-reaching slopes through a splendour of heath and ling and blossomed furze, who has never seen the broad shoulders of Dunkery save when they were wrapped about with royal purple, would find the moorland now in very different mood, would think it even now, far on towards the summer, desolate

and sad-coloured and forlorn. The gorse, indeed, is in its prime. Its fragrant gold is as full of beauty as when the mingled mob of horse and foot and carriages gathers, for the first Meet of the season, on the smooth crown of Cloutsham Ball.

The gorse is a flower of the year. It is in bloom even in January. There is an old saw that declares it to be, like kissing, never out of season. But the heather that covers so much of the slopes of Dunkery wears at this moment its very somberest of hues. Standing on the fringe of the moorland, on the brink of one of the deep glens that run into the heart of the hills, and looking up the slope towards the dark summit, one might think that winter was not over even yet. There is a touch of vivid green here and there, round the birthplace of some mountain stream. There is colour on the young birches that one by one are feeling their way up out of the hollow. But in the sober brown of the heather, in the pearl grey of the peat moss, in the dark hue of the gaunt and twisted pines scattered at far intervals in front of the advancing forest, there is no sign of the sweet influences of the spring.

A lonely spot. There is not a house in sight, no farm, no hedgerow, no sign of man's dominion

anywhere, beyond faint traces of bridle paths, like dark lines along the heath, or a broader track whose warm red shows a moment as it climbs some rising of the moor. A solitary skylark sings over the brown heather. At times a buzzard wails, as on broad wings he drifts in mighty circles overhead, a dark spot against the pale blue heaven. Sounds like these but deepen the sense of loneliness. But there is charm in the very solitude. There is charm in the dark heath and in the golden furze—in the play of the cloud-shadows that each moment change the tones of brown and green and grey. There is charm in the sweet breath of the gorse, and above all, in the bright, fresh air of the open moorland. And however bare and voiceless these sombre slopes, each hollow that wanders away into the hills is filled to overflowing with a sea of mingled foliage, all astir with life and movement.

The path that leads down from the highland to the hollow looks upon a different world. The steep sides of the glen are green to the very brim, are covered, right up to the brown fringe of heather, with noble oaks in the pride of fresh, young foliage, among whose golden green, all shimmering in a haze of sunlight, shows the

shadowy grey of boughs still bare, and in the open spaces are all carpeted with the rich red of dead bracken, or the vivid green of bilberry leaves. From far below, out of the mist of green and grey, rises the song of a swift mountain stream, whose pools and white cascades and brawling rapids gleam among the trees like scattered links of silver.

There is a sudden clatter of stones upon the farther slope. Two stags and four attendant hinds are making their way up from Horner Water. They pause and look this way; the head of the leader lifted, his antlers clear against the foliage behind him. This is Exmoor. Here the red deer are on their native heath. This is their last stronghold south of the Border. And it is in glens like this that they find the sanctuary they love. The noble beasts stand long at gaze. At last the leader turns, and moves slowly up the slope, the others falling into line behind him. They quicken the pace as they gain more easy ground, and breaking into a canter, wind in gallant style across the heath. They pause for a last look as they reach the summit of the ridge, their figures darkly cut against the sky.

The road sinks lower, lower yet, down into the

green heart of the glen. Noble trees they are that fill the hollow. Some have long since passed their prime. Their mighty branches are thick with moss and lichen, and fringed with green tongues of fern. In rifts that time and storm have carved in their huge columns, rowan and bramble and young holly trees are rooted. Grey arms of ivy, almost as broad and vigorous as they, are twined with fatal clasp about their sturdy stems. Where the pathway crosses at the ford, there stands a blasted tree: a giant oak, whose top, wrecked and shattered though it is, rises high above its forest brothers. Its bark has all fallen away. Its bare limbs glimmer ghost-like through the green gloom.

The whole glen is full of life. Solitude there may be, but not silence. The air is musical with the ripple of the stream, and with the songs of sweet-voiced warblers. Over the tree tops clamorous daws are passing, and the light wings of homeward-flying doves. Among the boulders that winter floods have heaped along the torrent—that even now, before the patient, eternal, resistless chafing of the water, are moving slowly down the stream—you may startle a heron from his noonday dreaming. Or you may come

unaware upon a pair of wild ducks, paddling softly on one of the smooth and sheltered reaches, the mallard still splendid in the nuptial plumage he is so soon to lose. Only a few weeks longer will he wear it. Summer will find him in a quiet-coloured garb, a suit of brown and grey as plain and unpretending as the dress of his sober-tinted mate.

This, too, is the dipper's haunt. Again and again you will meet him on his way up stream, flying swift and straight, with sharp note of warning on spying a stranger near his fishing grounds. Or you may watch him as he stands on some small island in the torrent, his white breast gleaming like a patch of silver in the water under him, bowing and calling, and now breaking off into that sweet, wild song so dear to the soul of the fisherman. The dipper's nest of moss and leaves and withered sedges, hidden deftly in some old stump by the shore, is empty and deserted. His mate and he are out all day on the river with their little mob of dusky children.

It is a pleasant path that winds leisurely along the glen, now wandering with the stream, now passing it by a ford, now loitering among the trees, now fenced on either hand with tall thickets

of gorse and briar and hawthorn, now keeping close by the grey willows that overhang the water. It is not a wide stream to cross, for all the rain. The deer, whose fresh footmarks are printed deep in the moist earth all along its banks, can easily leap over it. The squirrels on their airy highway along meeting oak boughs far above it, have no need to think of it at all. But for the rabbits there is no way over but through the stream itself. And here, a few days since, a rabbit, startled from the herbage on the brink, took to the water without a moment's hesitation; a mere baby of a rabbit, so small and slight that it was carried along for yards by the swift current before it could get into shallow water and struggle up the bank.

Suddenly two birds rise soaring from the trees, better seen when they are clear of the valley, and sharply drawn against the sky. One slow-winged and heavy, one quick and active, and deft in every movement. A crow and a sparrow-hawk. They are fighting. Sounds of battle float downwards through the air—the fierce defiance of the hawk, the hoarse answer of his black antagonist. Round and round they go, wheeling, sinking, soaring, now the hawk uppermost, and now the crow. To

watch the skilful manœuvres of the hawk, one might think there was little doubt about the issue. How easily he sweeps past his lumbering enemy, how he clutches at him with talons, how he flouts him with his strong wings. Yet the crow, for all his awkwardness, is armed with no mean weapon. The hawk knows well the value of that black dagger of a bill. And so they drift over the rim of the valley to the open moorland, fighting to the last.



ON EXMOOR: WHERE RED DEER HIDE.

HIGH up on the moorland, in a wilderness of dead heather—surely beyond all power of spring-time to call back to life—with dead gorse bushes scattered over it, gaunt and spectral, unlighted by any touch of golden bloom, there stands an ancient grave-mound. It is the merest flaw in the wide landscape. A roadway passes near it. But from elsewhere, unless it chanced to cut the sky line, you might search for it in vain.

Looking across the grassy rim of the hollow space within it, a space like the crater of some spent volcano, you see nothing but the pale summer sky above you, and, stretching away on every side, a waste of desolate, far-reaching undulations, to whose wintry hues the scanty patches of grass and the tender tone of the late bilberry plants have hardly, even yet, lent any tinge of green.

This is the very heart of the wilderness. There is not a house in sight. There are no fields, no fences, no horses, no red cattle, not a sheep even; no single moving figure, save of a bird that flits restlessly among the gorse. This is almost as bleak and bare a landscape as the haunt of the "Dead Drummer" upon Salisbury Plain.

Yet it is a beautiful landscape, still and lonely though it be. There is no gold of blossomed gorse, no rich Tyrian of early heather. But there is marvellous wealth of colour even in these sheets of dead ling, whose varied greys and browns are strengthened here to deep shades of purple, and there,—by a carpet of withered brake fern, beaten down by wind and rain, and with stout young fronds but just beginning to uncurl,—are

On Exmoor: Where Red Deer Hide. 77

fairly kindled into red. At one point a belt of dry sedges gleams like a grey river. At another a patch of vivid green betrays the birthplace of some moorland stream. Round the old hawthorns, dotted here and there over the waste, a green mist is gathering. But the starved and stunted trees of this high upland country are slow to answer to the sunshine, and there are hardly leaves enough yet to hide the shaggy tufts of lichen, silver grey and golden yellow, that hang so thickly on the boughs. In the thorny depths of these storm-beaten trees, even carrion crows venture to build fastnesses, fearing nothing, though with thresholds not six feet above ground, short of an avenging volley from the keeper's gun.

As the hours go by you grow conscious, by degrees, of companions of your solitude. You hear notes of larks and pipits as they flit here and there among the heather. You catch the faint far call of a wandering cuckoo. A stonechat settles near, on a tall, dead furze bush, and sings over and over his brief roundelay. There are few dwellers on the heath more smart than he, with his coal-black head, his neat white collar, and his ruddy breast. This, too, is the native heath of yonder curlews, wheeling idly

across the sky, sounding now and then that musical, clear call, that is one of the most characteristic voices of the moorland.

The black-cock, the true children of the wilderness, are lying close among the heather. The grey dawn is the time to see them best, when they come down to drink and bathe at favourite points along the streams. Towards nightfall, too, you will hear on all sides, but especially on the fringe of the wooded valleys where they come to feed, their strange, hoarse crying, which it is hard to credit is the note of bird at all. In the twilight each old black-cock will take his stand on some hillock, or even on the level ground, and spreading wide his splendid tail, drooping his wings, and sinking his head, like a stag preparing to give battle, will utter strange, almost weird, sounds, which, as you watch his odd figure, and fantastic attitudes, you would hardly think were meant as notes of challenge to his rivals, intended to be full of defiance and contempt.

Beyond the white cart-track, that just shows for a moment before it sinks behind a rising in the heath, runs a deep valley—a great hollow filled almost to the brim with oaks and beeches and tall

On Exmoor: Where Red Deer Hide. 79

larch trees;—they, at least, are in the full pride of their magnificent young beauty, with long branches thickly hung with tufts of fragrant green. It is a valley of streams, that, drawn in silver threads from every hill-slope near, set all along with alder and willow, with ferns and rushes, and cool water plants, go plunging through at last out of the narrow gateway of the glen, to widen farther down into a broad, smooth flood, that sweeps in silence among the worn stepping-stones of a village way.

The valley is full of life; full as the moorland here is bare of it. In the great bank that skirts the wood badgers have their holt. Hard by it is a famous “earth,” to which every hunted fox for miles round flees for sanctuary. The woodmen have been busy here. The ground is strewn with red larch chips, whose sweet, resinous fragrance hangs heavy on the air. And from the welcome rest of some new-felled tree, whose shorn plumes lie heaped about it in well-ordered faggots, you may listen to the pleasant voices of the doves, and the blithe notes of warblers in the boughs above you. You may watch the pheasants stalking solemnly among the underwood, may see the brown squirrels romping on the grass, or playing

follow the leader up and down the smooth-stemmed beech trees. A charmed spot. A spot such as the poet sang of, who

“ . . . heard the cushies croon—

Through the gowden afternoon,

And the Quhair burn singing on its way down to the Tweed.”

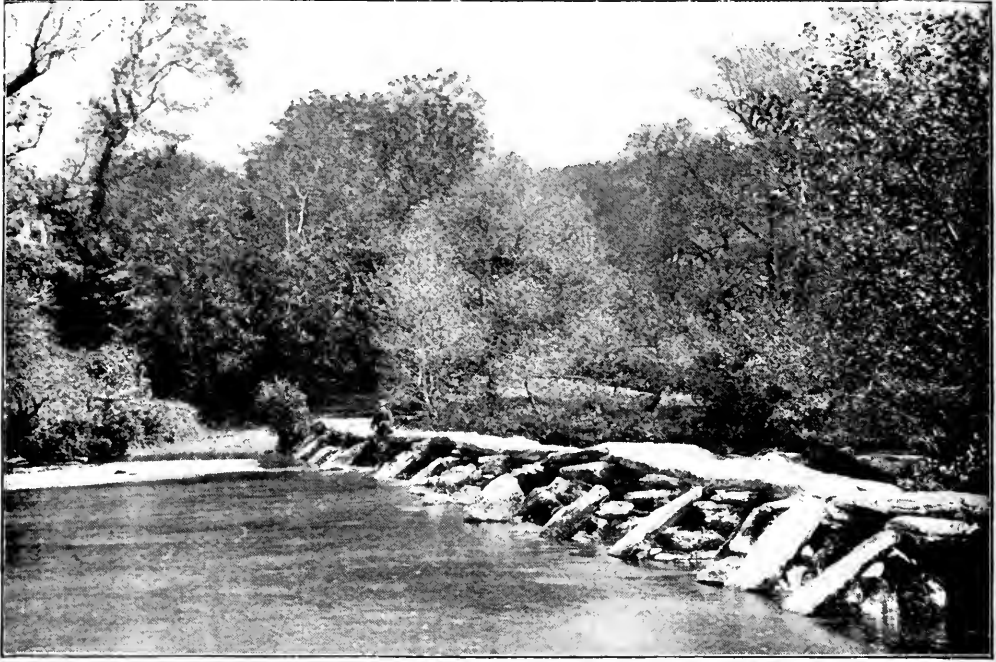
The red deer love this quiet glen. You may see their sharp footprints along every woodman's path, and by the oozy marge of every stream. Their hour is not yet. Like the fox and the badger, they are lovers of the twilight. It is not till evening darkens that they leave their lairs in the cool depths of the larch copse or the shadowy heart of the oak plantation, and cross the high dyke that parts the farm lands from the cover, and sally out to raid the young corn and the turnips in outlying fields. This is the Red Deer Country. Empty as the landscape is at noon, there are times when this wild heath is all alive with moving figures, horse and hound, and all the bravery of the shouting chase. Many a time has the hunt swept past this solitary tumulus, the gallant stag seen for a moment, perhaps, upon the sky line, as

“ With anxious eye he wandered o'er

Mountain and meadow, moss and moor.”

On Exmoor: Where Red Deer Hide. 81

There is no hamlet for miles around but has its legends, old and new, of a sport that is dear to all the country side. In one of the moorland churches it is recorded how, some six hundred years since, a villager slew one of the King's deer; how the culprit was "not found," and how, in the end, four neighbouring parishes paid fine to the royal foresters. It is but a mile as the crow flies to a hamlet, lying deep in a hollow of the hills, where last year, when the chase went thundering through the quiet street, the stag, in his despair, sought refuge in the inn, and was pulled down by the hounds within the doorway of the hostelry. It is the most picturesque of inns, with its rambling buildings, its thatched roofs, mossed and lichen stained, its tiny dormer windows, and a sign that has puzzled many an idler on the village green;—uncertain whether, as some would have it, the figure in scarlet is meant for a woman seated on a stile; whether it is a nabob mounted on an elephant; or whether, as the words that run above it would suggest, it is a Roundhead trooper drawing rein under the oak of Boscobel.



TORR STEPS: A MOORLAND RIVER.

DOWN a deep valley in the West Country winds a swift moorland stream. Mile after mile of sombre, heath-clad solitudes stretch away on either side of it, broken with gorse and bracken, and with here and there a few stunted and storm-beaten trees. Well-ordered farm lands slope down to it. At far intervals it roars under the ancient bridges of solitary hamlets. Here, in the heart of the great hills, it runs between wooded slopes, covered with thick growth of sturdy oak trees—leafless still, but with purple of fast opening

Torr Steps: A Moorland River. 83

blossoms that, with the rich red brown of dead leaves and withered fern about their feet, lends to the whole glen a glow of warmth and colour.

Here the red deer steal out after sundown over the ruinous wall and through the untended hedgerow to the broad meadow that for a space divides the river from the wood. Here in the twilight the otters play, rolling over and over in the water like great grey cats. The beautiful moorland sheep that lift their horned heads to watch the solitary wayfarer, with half-curious, half-supercilious gaze, seem hardly less the true creatures of the wild than the grey rabbit that you startle from his noonday dreaming among the long grass by the hedgerow, or than the brown squirrel, coming down for a frolic on the soft, green turf.

Below the wooded slope runs the river, here foaming over great blocks of stone lying prostrate in its bed, there eddying round a jutting bar of rock, now loitering in quiet backwaters, where dead leaves and tufts of grass and all the smaller flotsam of the stream spin slowly on the tranquil surface. At one point it roars through a narrow channel between two ponderous stones, which lie calm and unmoved in all the headlong rush; at another it pauses, silent, in a deep, dark pool.

Now it is broken all across in a tumultuous cataract, and now again it widens to a broad sheet of waving glass. At a bend in the river bank—a little hollow worn by the floods of many winters—three alders overhang. And at their feet, close to the margin of the stream, sheltered by a screen of strong young branches growing upward from the base of the trees, is a pleasant resting-place from which to watch unseen the life and movement of this bird-haunted hollow—the warblers that throng the thickets by the shore, the dippers that on swift wings pass and repass along the watery highway, the graceful wagtails that with dainty steps run up and down upon the strips of sand.

Looking down from the edge of the slope at the far end of the meadow, framed by the broad arms of giant trees, show the buildings of a farm, that with its wide eaves and crested gables, its deep-sunk dormer windows, its rows of hives, and its ruinous sheds, is a picture in itself. Close by it one of the moorland highways, a narrow country lane, slopes steeply down, crossing the river by a ford. And by the road, its grey masonry clearly drawn against the shadowy spires of thick-growing alder trees, is an old stone bridge—so old that no clue remains, no legend even, to its history or its

builders. Two thousand years, perhaps, has the river run beneath these ponderous slabs of stone, laid flat across rude, unmortared piers.

Beyond the bridge, through a purple mist of branches, show silver glimpses of the river, then a broad stretch of meadow with dark pine woods above it, among which the young larch foliage floats in feathery clouds of green, and above these again, the brown and desolate moorland. Near the bridge a little party of wanderers have made their camp. The blue smoke of their fire drifts slowly this way, with the pleasant scent of burning pine wood, the pleasanter voices of girls and the shouts of children. It is a perfect day for camping in the open; with warm air, and blue sky, and soft white clouds sailing slowly over,—a day of clear shining after rain.

The air over the stream is full of insect life, of flies of many shapes and various hues, of browns, and drakes, and duns, so dear to the brown river trout; and, in counterfeit presentment at any rate, almost dearer to the soul of the trout-fisher. And as you watch the myriad wingèd things that sail along the water, that settle on the warm stones, or on the alder boughs, or even on your hand, you will think it small ground for wonder that

the thickets by the stream should be so full of birds.

One might think that the roar of the river would be enough to drown all other sounds. But, clear above it rise the notes of tits and finches and warblers. The breezy chatter of the swallows, the call of the dipper, the woodwren's hasty little stave of song, the whistle of the blackbird, the mellow call of the cuckoo, are as plain as if the great voice of the river were not heard at all. In the next tree two finches have alighted; their restless movements and sharp challenge of alarm betraying only too plainly what they are so anxious to conceal, that their nest is somewhere near. Two beautiful birds they are; one with the red flush on his breast, the broad bar of white in either wing, the slate-blue feathers of his lifted crest. The other, hardly less charming, with all her colours pitched in soberer key. With anxious and persistent iteration of their one shrill note of protest, they flit from branch to branch; and when you rise, and peer into the tangle of ivy-mantled boughs above you, the birds grow more clamorous still. There is the nest, its mossy cup woven deftly among the slender twigs, studded all over with lichen points of silver—as ever, a miracle of beauty.

There are many birds preparing for the great event of the year. It is not for nothing, you may be sure, that that old blackbird has stayed out at the same corner of the hedge every day for a week past; there is some good reason for his stealing towards it now across the wood, a moving shadow, quiet for once. We can read the signs of the times in the notes of the birds no less than in the heightened colours of their plumage. It is a love-song pure and simple that yonder hedge sparrow, poised on a straying spray of bramble, is singing so softly to himself. The ringing call of an oxeye overhead never was more clear, and blithe, and musical. But the soft notes of a flock of long-tailed tits, not yet disbanded, have a still softer tone to-day. Their light-hearted gossip seems subdued and low, as if they knew the days were near when every woodlander will go about his work with all the stealth he may. There is a gold-crest rummaging among the ivy that clings about an old elm hard by, almost within arm's length, so near that the touch of vivid yellow on his crown gleams like very gold.

Smoke is still rising from the white ashes of the fire, but it is proof enough that the little group has moved away, and that no one is visible from

the highway of the river, when a kingfisher flashes across the bridge, straight up the stream, a swift gleam of azure through the sunlit air. As you follow its flight to the bend where the river vanishes behind its fringing alders, you are aware of a moving point of light on one of the great boulders far out from shore. Then the shape of a dipper shows clearly on the top of the stone. A moment later it dives straight down into the water, reappearing some yards nearer this way, pausing on another great block of sandstone, to bow and curtsy, uttering now and then a loud, clear note, its white gorget glowing like a star, whiter even than the very foam of the river. Now it swims lightly across a smooth backwater. Now it works its way sidelong across a rapid rush of the current, stooping now and then to pick some dainty morsel from among the stones, and all the while moving slowly with the stream, until at last it stands on a stone in mid-channel, not thirty yards away—a graceful, charming, dainty little figure, the very naiad of the mountain stream.

But alas, there is another spectator of its movements. Across the meadow sails a dark, hawk-like figure, swift and silent, disappearing in the oak wood on the farther shore. In a moment

every voice is hushed. Not a bird calls. Not even a wren dares to utter an alarm. There is a sudden rush of wings. A merlin dashes from the thicket by the shore, catches up the dipper in its cruel claws, and, alighting on a great flat stone, in the middle of the river, it buries its merciless bill again and again in the white breast of its struggling captive. What a picture! The sunlight is full on the blue back of the beautiful little falcon, as it leans forward a little, half hiding its prey under its drooping wings. Giving a swift glance to right and left—the sparkle of its keen eyes plain to see—it tears out a little cloud of feathers that flutter lightly down, and sail away upon the stream. Again the merlin looks up. Something has startled him. He gives one glance this way. He catches sight of a figure under the alder trees. Like a flash he is gone. The dead dipper falls into the water, sailing down the river, in which but a few minutes since it was playing, full of life and happiness, the white feathers from its blood-stained gorget floating away from it at every swirl of the current; a sorrowful little heap of ruffled plumage, whirling with the whirling stream.



WINSFORD: VOICES THREE.

ON the slopes of a great hollow in the heart of Exmoor, a hot sun beats fiercely down. True that it is an April sky whose clouds and sunshine weave their changing web of lights and shadows over the landscape. True that the landscape, even yet, wears but little of the guise of springtime. But to-day no touch of east is in the air, and the smoke columns, rising slowly from the chimneys of the village, and showing so

blue against the oak plantation on a distant shoulder of the moorland, are drifting slowly from the southward. From this upland country, over which the snow lay deep for two whole months, the grip of winter has been slow to loosen. But the trees and hedgerows are answering at last to the magical influence of the sunshine, and "the useful trouble of the rain." The grass of these rich meadow lands—for months past all burnt and brown, as if after a long, rainless summer—wears now its very loveliest hue. There is a fringe of pale blue violets along the edge of every woodland path. Stars of celandine are scattered over every field, and among the tangle of the withered hedge-row grasses. Marsh marigolds are gleaming in the wet earth about the roots of the alders by the river. Even at this distance, the great clumps of primroses show like points of light on the slope of the orchard by the vicarage. Surely never were there such beautiful masses of wood-sorrel as, with their vivid leaves and dainty, purple-veined flowers, brighten now the banks of every deep-worn lane.

The tall chestnut by the church, but yesterday just dusted over with fine points of gold, is now a very cloud of fresh young foliage. Each day

strengthens the green hue of the larches crowning the bold spur beyond the village. Each day deepens the warm purple of fast-opening blossoms round the heads of the tall elms of the village, and the great oaks of this warm slope. Noble trees they are, these hoary patriarchs that the woodman's axe has spared. Their mighty branches, gnarled and twisted and storm-beaten, towering far up against the pale blue heaven, are shaggy with ages' growth of lichens. Moss grows thick over the furrowed rind, not of their broad stems alone, but almost of their topmost branches. In the crannies of the bark, fringed with grey-green tongues of fern, woodbine and briar and slim mountain-ash have found anchorage. Over their old arms the nuthatches wander up and down, calling to each other with that loud musical trill so characteristic of the springtime.

On every side, among the broad stumps of vanished forest monarchs, long dethroned, are springing the sturdy forms of another generation, young pines and oaks and beeches, that are doing their best to fill the places of the fallen, and although the giant sycamore that overhangs the path is still all bare and leafless, everywhere in the grass beneath its shadow, its children, tiny

double blades of tender green, are springing,
thousands strong.

It is a scene of marvellous beauty upon which the eye looks down from the welcome rest of this fallen tree beside the woodland path. Below, at the foot of the slope, the border line between the wild life of the covert and the order of the well-kept farm lands, runs a swift moorland stream, whose broad band of silver is broken again and again by the rude stone bridges of the village streets. Every reach of the river seems to have its several sound, that,

“Low at times, and loud at times
And changing like a poet’s rhymes,”

seems, with the rush of the wind among the rocking tops, and with the songs and call-notes of a hundred birds, to fill the hollow. In the pauses of the roar of the white lasher by the mill, a roar that sinks and swells with every flaw that blows, the ear may catch now the sound of the swift current brawling over its brown pebbles, now the swirl of water round a bar of shingle, now the chafing of the stream among the alder roots, and now the soft sound of ripples on a sandy shallow. Round the broad green knoll that rises from the river, filling all the centre of the valley,

and almost islanded by wandering streams, cluster the houses of the hamlet, whose white walls and brown and moss-grown roofs of thatch, whose pointed gables and quaint deep-sunk dormer windows show plainly now among sheltering elms, that in the summer-time will hide them in a very bower of green.

High over the roofs of the village, high even above the topmost trees, rises the grey tower of the church. Round its turrets a troop of daws are fluttering. Is it only fancy, or is there really a note of protest and impatience in their snatches of clear-cut speech? For weeks past these bold frequenters of the church have been piling sticks upon the turret stair, by way of foundation for their great untidy nests. They had strewn a cart-load of rubbish over the floor of the belfry, when the sexton arose in his wrath and blocked up all the tower windows and the loophole lights of the stairway, so that the daws were compelled to change their quarters to the roofs of the village. But they still linger round their ancestral home-stead, and one pair, determined not to quit altogether the sacred precincts that have sheltered them and theirs for generations, have established themselves in a niche behind the iron pipe of the

stove. It is a hole that might just contain the nest, but the birds have thought it necessary to fill up with sticks a yard or more of the space between the chimney and the tower wall, as if by way of outworks to their fortress.

A flood of sunshine is falling at this moment on the ancient tower, on the brown thatch of the old houses, on the purple lacework of the budding elms, until the whole beautiful picture stands clear-drawn against the soft background of the far hillside, still all in shadow. The sunlight glitters on the slate roofs of houses lower down, and flashes on the winding river until every reach of it is a sheet of burnished silver. Now it brightens yet more the vivid green of the meadows, now it touches the red slopes of distant corn-lands, and now it seems to linger on a far shoulder of the moor, whose brown heath and dead grey gorse bushes, and ancient thorn trees straggling up the hill, are transfigured to a very vision of glory by the dreamy, sunlit haze.

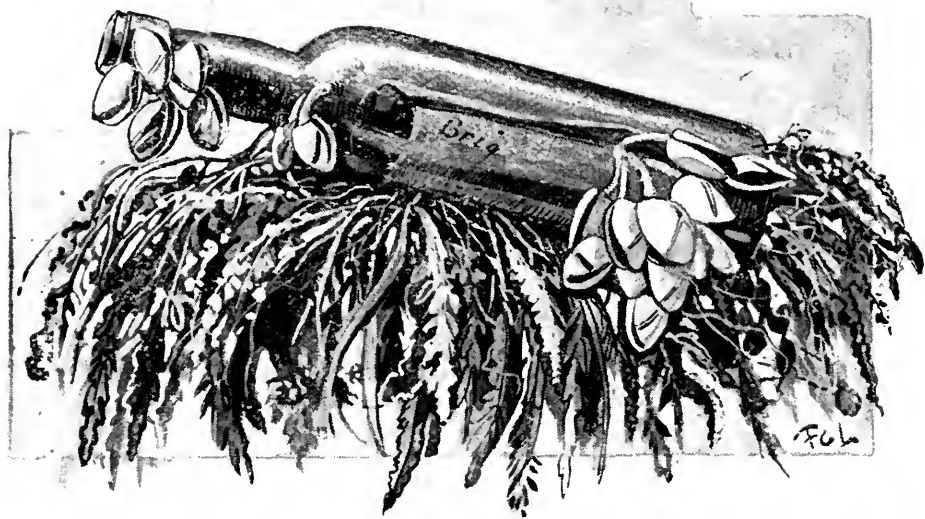
Dream-like, too, is the quiet that broods over this peaceful valley—a quiet even deepened by those Voices Three, of the wind, and the birds, and the river. No sound of toil or traffic rises from the village, save the clink of iron in the smithy,

the thud of a woodman's axe among the young alders by the water, or, still more rarely, the lumbering of a cart along one of the deep lanes that slope upward to the moor, or that wander with the winding streams. The wind that sways the oak boughs overhead has a stormy sound. But this sheltered corner under the hill, with its screen of thick-growing fir and holly, is full of the warm south, of soft and gentle airs, scented with the sweet resinous fragrance of the pines.

And all the while, louder than the rush of the wind, clearer far than the sound of the river, there float from tree to tree the happy voices of the woodland singers. Everywhere among the leafless boughs the chiff-chaffs are calling. Here and there along the slope a tree pipit, rising high above his station upon some yet wintry branch, sinks slowly downward through the sunny air, singing as he sinks, till he alights again upon his windy perch. Loud above all other sounds there strikes in now and then the whistle of a blackbird, wild and clear, and at times the yet sweeter carol of the blackcap. Rooks call hoarsely to each other as they pass, on the way to their great settlement far down the river. At times the white pigeons of the vicarage, hovering a moment in

mid-air, descend like a shower of snowflakes on their dovecot. From the shelter of the old Scotch firs at the far end of the wood, where the trees have long been left untouched, come now and then the deep notes of carrion crows, low-toned, sullen, unmirthful. They are ill neighbours for all the weaker children of the wood. Later on in the season, the edge of the Punch Bowl, that great hollow beyond the oak coppice, whose rim just shows against the sky line, the hollow where the red deer are so fond of lying, will be strewn with broken eggs of black game and pheasant, the spoil of raids in the heather and the covert. And here, too, scattered under the trees, are broken ringdoves' eggs, bearing plainly the marks of those black-coated, merciless marauders. From that corner too, out of the jungle of broom, and hazel, and wild-briar, comes at intervals the crow of a pheasant—a strident and far-reaching cry, different altogether from all other woodland voices. And in every tree along the slope willow warblers are crooning, over and over, their dainty snatches of sweet, low-toned song. It is a sleepy tune; a leisurely cadence of soft sounds, suggestive of sunshine and the summer, of

“Music, that gentler on the spirit lies,
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes.”



BREAN DOWN: FLOTSAM AND JETSAM.

IT is a cold, grey world that lies waiting for the dawn—a misty sky, in which one pale planet glimmers; a hazy sea, whose fretted levels shine faintly in the moonlight; shadowy hills, along whose winding line, here darkened with clustering woodlands, and there whitened by still slumbering hamlets, a grey mist hangs. It hangs, too, like a vast canopy, over the wide plain, whose sunburnt meadows seem to melt away into an

infinite distance; and along the wandering river whose brown flood loiters idly to the sea.

A silent world, for the most part. Even the voice of the river, that but now was chafing loud against the shingle bar piled high along the shore, is failing in the swift inrush of the tide. It is a slow moving and taciturn stream that, as it wound along the level fringes of the hills, long since forgot the sunshine and the laughter and the crystal clearness of its youth, when, under banks that were hung with fern and meadow-sweet, it sang over the brown pebbles of its bed, round

“ . . . Many a fairy foreland, set
With willow-weed and mallow.”

But the tide, that is hushing the hoarse song of the river, swells louder every moment the troubled roar of the sea, whose grey waves are plunging in over the rattling shingle and the shining sand.

And as the light of dawning strengthens over the low grey hills to the eastward, other sounds break in upon the stillness. Far off across the moor a curlew calls. A heron who all night long, it may be, has been keeping his lone vigil in the marshes, and who is now flying leisurely homeward to the hills, lets fall a muttered croak in

passing—midnight revellers both. But the white gulls that rise and fall and toy like butterflies above the broadening stream calling to each other with discordant voices, are children of the sunshine.

Of the sunshine, too, is the music of a lark, who, high up in the grey mist, brooding like a fate over the brown and thirsty meadows, seems to hover at the very gates of dawn. Yet there is a sound of the sea even on his silvery tongue. Among the sweet notes of his familiar “babble of green fields,” he brings in at times the cry of the curlew and the whistle of the plover.

A breath of the sea there is, too, in the chatter of the starling on the roof above. The croak of the heron and the call of the whimbrel are common speech with him. And now he even imitates the creak of the cordage on the coasting smack swinging in the stream yonder, where two men are busy setting the old brown sails.

From the cliffs that break the round swell of the hill a line of daws are streaming, eager, clamorous, on the wing for their hunting ground upon the moor. One troop has wheeled aside to alight among the boughs of a cherry-tree in a little walled-in space of garden at some distance

from the house. The farmer, who has just appeared, with his milking-pail upon his shoulder, and who looks up to nod a friendly greeting, pauses a moment in the doorway to watch the marauders at their work, while the old sheep-dog waits wondering at his side.

Suddenly, far out on the moor, beyond the cattle that stand motionless, expectant, all looking this way, a tall figure looms out of the mist, and across the fields comes a strange cry :

“Leave your meadow grasses mellow,
Mellow, mellow ;
Quit your cowslips, cowslips yellow.”

The old dog hears, and bounds forward to his work. But the sleek and sober herd, never turning their heads to look behind them, move slowly, as by common impulse, converging fanwise to the gate. Men in white smocks, and with shining pails upon their backs, are striding through the meadows towards the farm. And all the while the milking call sounds at intervals across the fields :—

“Quit your pipes of parsley hollow,
Hollow, hollow ;
Come uppe Lightfoot, rise and follow ;
Lightfoot, Whitefoot,
From your clovers lift the head.”

But along the side of the green headland that, beyond the old farm-buildings stretches a mile or more into the sea, silence still reigns, save for the sound of the waves, for the plaintive cry of a curlew or the clamour of a troop of gulls.

When a gleam of sunshine breaks the grey veil of cloud, changing the sombre hues of the mud flats to warm tones of brown and purple, turning to gold the broad beach and the ragged sand-hills, birds, unseen before, start swiftly into view. Here a tall curlew stalks solemnly along, erect and watchful. There an inky crow is picking dainty morsels from the ooze. And here a party of trim black-headed gulls have collected round some treasure trove left by the last tide. A troop of sandpipers sweeps along, now flashing in a hundred points of silver in the sunlight; now, as they wheel, all lost again in the brown hues of their haunts. As far as the eye can reach are scattered gulls, shieldrakes, oyster-catchers, rock-doves even, foraging by the edge of the water, falling back before the rising tide.

But sounds of life are faint, even now. Among the boulders pipits flit at times with feeble cries. And a brood of young kestrels lately fledged, sail and soar along the cliff farther on, and scream as

if in defiance of the wind, against which their keen wings are beating. The rocky brows that overhang the shore are thick with grasses and sweet bedstraw, with flags and mullein, and tall evening primrose. In the crannies campion and sea-pink are rooted. Here a yellow poppy trembles in the wind, and there a great cluster of samphire fills a rocky cleft. There are tufts of it quite low down, but it is a plant that always grows above high-water mark, and many a shipwrecked sailor, thrown ashore among the rocks, has taken heart again when, in the darkness, his despairing grasp has tightened on those strangely smelling leaves. It is St. Peter's plant—Saint Pierre, sampier, samphire.

Now the shrill screaming of the kestrels rises louder still, the fierce cry of the old birds mingling with the plaintive clamour of their brood. Now one of them, sweeping round the headland, poises a moment in the air, his wings motionless, his tail spread wide, his figure dark upon the western sky. Slowly stooping, he alights on the crown of a rocky pinnacle, a crag that stands out from the cliff like the tower of some old stronghold; and, with feet spread wide, clutching with his strong claws the rifted rock, his head lowered

to the wind, stands a splendid figure, as still as if he were the living rock. Many a keen-eyed falcon has looked out over the sea from that high watch tower, round whose base wander grey arms of ivy, gnarled and wrinkled, centuries old.

Nor do hawks alone find sanctuary here. So quiet is this lonely shore, so complete its solitude, that among these cliffs even the raven and the peregrine are safe.

In the shelter of a long line of sand-hills that centuries have heaped over the old sea-wall, there stands a solitary cottage. Its brown eaves just peer over the dyke of sand. No window looks to seaward through its massy wall. It is close above high-water mark. Often, on wild nights of winter,

“The startled waves leap over it; the storm
Smites it with all the scourges of the rain,
And steadily against its solid form
Press the great shoulders of the hurricane.”

Close by it runs a belt of shingle, and, beyond, there stretches away to the brown sea a wide sweep of sand, on whose wet surface the heron and the curlew leave their traces, where whole armies of sandpipers weave a maze of tiny foot-prints. To them this barren shore is a land of

plenty. This open beach is to them the very safest of sanctuaries. No wildfowler can get within range of them unobserved. Their only foes are the herring-gull—the pirate of the sea—or the keen-eyed falcon that has his hold in yonder cliff.

Except at times of very high tides—even then only when accompanied by stormy weather—the sea never quite reaches to the sand-hills; but in summer especially, a mirage is occasionally seen on this wide beach,—a phantom sea, in whose smooth surface are reflected the jagged line of sand-hills, the church of the distant village, and the few houses scattered at far intervals along the coast.

It is a fruitful plain, whose level meadows stretch away from the old farm, fading only on the far horizon. So low it lies that, were it not for yonder mounds of sand, whose jagged fringes line the coast for miles, the high October tides would often, when a strong wind is blowing, find their way among the hamlets far inland. Many a time has the old wall given way; never, perhaps, with quite such dire results as in the great flood of 1607, when the salt water was twelve feet deep in villages five miles from the

sea. Thirty hamlets were overwhelmed. Scores of unhappy villagers perished. So swift was the rush of the water that there was no chance of escape, and for many—in the words of a black-letter chap-book of the time, “their last refuge was patiently to die. Cattle were drowned in droves. Rabbits being driven out of their burroughes by the tyde, were seene to sit for safety on the backs of sheepe, as they swom up and downe, and at last were drowned with them. . . . Deade bodies floate hourelly above water, and are continually taken uppe. It cannot yet be knowne howe manye have fell in this Tempest of God’s fearful judgement.”

Life here was not always quiet. The green slopes of the hill above are scarred all along with old earthworks, so defaced by plough and spade, so trampled down by men and cattle, so worn by the storms of untold centuries, that the eye can hardly trace their outlines in the smooth short sward. Not even a tradition survives of the lost inhabitants whose rude pottery and flint arrow-heads the rabbits bring up among the red earth of their burrows. Compared with this old hill fortress, the earthworks round the tower of the church yonder, the square lines of a Roman camp,

the last fort on the well-guarded road down which was brought metal from the mines among the hills, are works of yesterday.

Again and again this coast was wasted by the Danes, who plundered not the hamlets by the shore alone, but villages twenty miles from the sea. Victory was not always with the invaders. Athelney is not far distant. Ethandune was on that low line of hills to the southward. And in the very year of that crowning victory, a few miles farther down, "the brother of Hingwar and "Halfdene came with twenty-three ships . . . and "he was there slain, and with him eight hundred "and forty of his army, and there was taken the "war-flag which they called the Raven." By the river that loiters seaward under the blue hills across the bay, whose broad mouth shines like silver in the sun, still stands the green mound of Hubbalowe, which the vikings piled over the ashes of the dead sea-rover. On every hill-top in the West Country

"The brake and the tufted grass are high
On the low mounds where warriors lie "

Each point of vantage on the hills has its time-worn lines of old entrenchments. There is hardly a lofty crest but has had its cluster of green grave

mounds. But of the builders there remains little but the shapes of their ruined strongholds, their rude pottery, and still ruder weapons, from which to build up our dim conjectures of what manner of men they were who held these hill tops against the arms of Claudius and Vespasian. Even of the legionaries who forced their way thus far into the West, our knowledge has been gained by fragments. It is by accident that we have obtained our most vivid glimpses of their arts, their arms, their way of life. Massive ingots of lead have from time to time been found in the fields or along the line of one or other of the old military roads, whose stamps showed clearly how soon, after the landing of Claudius, the conquerors took possession of the mining country.

Again, when the plough struck on a stone coffin in a field remote from any sign of human occupation; and when further search revealed the ruins of a Roman villa, with beautiful pavements still undisturbed, it was possible to guess, from the lettering of the coins which were strewn among broken amphoræ and scraps of Samian, the very year in which the house was last inhabited. Many a hoard of silver pieces has been found among

Brean Down: Flotsam and Jetsam. 109

these hills, buried doubtless in some "dark hour of doubt and dread," to wait for better times that never came. Many a time the labourer's spade has clashed on a rusted spear-head, a broken urn, a handful of denarii. At times even on

"A tarnished ring, whose fiery gems,
Still on its circle set,
From the far sands of Indus brought,
Gleam through their setting, rudely wrought,
As if the sky, their hues had caught,
Flamed in their glory yet."

Relics like these—a flint arrowhead, a fragment of pottery, a handful of denarii, a camp, a tumulus—eke out the scanty records of the time, the pages of Asser, the meagre outlines of the Saxon chronicle.

Hardly a point in all the landscape but is linked with some stirring memory. It was on the little island lying off the point here that Githa found refuge after Hastings. Two years later all this shore was ravaged by the sons of Harold; and in the Domesday record, made eighteen years afterwards, we still can trace their handiwork in the lessened values of villages they had plundered. Over and over again after the brief sketch of a hamlet, its list of boors and villeins, its corn and grass land, its mill, its fishpond—perhaps even its

patch of vineyard—follow such words as these: “it was worth 100s., now only 60”; or “it was worth four pounds, now only 40 shillings.”

In the Armada days—for half a century, indeed, before the sailing of “that great fleet invincible”—there stood, on the high ground across the river, according to a quaint map of the period, “The Coste of England uppon Seuerne,” a tower, in which a gun was mounted, as a defence against invasion. Not a stone remains of the tower which in King Harry’s time guarded the little port. But all this coast was armed and ready, years before the sailing of the Armada, watching for the red glow on Dawnsboro’ that should call up the bold yeomen of the moors to face the “Inquisition dogs, and the devildoms of Spain.”

“The trewthe is,” wrote the Muster-Master, in his report to the Government—“after having vewed and trayned the nombers bothe of foote and horse twyce since my coming into this countie—the trewthe is, it is a most gallaunte contrey for the men, armor, and rediness.” The authorities were constantly furnished with “Certyffycathes,” showing the numbers of duly qualified pikemen and archers. Again and again were the justices

Brean Down: Flotsam and Jetsam. 111

urged to keep everything in readiness, since “the wings of man’s life are plumed with the feathers of death”; and to train their men to meet any emergency, because “great dilatory wants are found upon all sudden hurly-burlies.” Early Orders in Council declared that any able-bodied man between seventeen and fifty-nine who should be found to “lacke a bowe and fower arrowes” was to be fined.

Later, in Elizabeth’s reign, more attention was paid to the use of firearms, and most minute instructions were issued from headquarters as to the training of marksmen. The musket was to be fired at first with priming only, then with half a charge, and finally, when the men were ready for it, the full amount of powder was to be used. This was with an eye to the right training of men who, “by reason of the churlishness of their pieces, and not being made acquainted therewith by degrees, are ever after so discouraged as either they wincke or pull their heades from the piece, whereby they take no perfect level, but shoot at random, and so never prove good shottes.”

Among the seaweed on the bank of shingle by the cottage all kinds of strange things are found—

palm wood, long bamboos, seeds from the West Indies, sabots, children's toys. Once even a clock was washed up on the beach. A few months since the sands were strewn with parts of carriages from the wreck of a vessel that was carrying railway plant to South America. As you stand in the little garden, whose broad edges are none too good protection for it against the wind, you will notice that everything about the place has a touch of this sombre local colouring. Every piece of woodwork is part of a wreck. There is not a hinge or a bolt, hardly a nail even that did not come out of some ship's fittings. The posts on which the garden gate is hung are pieces of a mast. The gate itself is made of planks that have been picked up on the sand. Mahogany panels from the saloon of some steamship have been worked into the walling of the garden shed. No coal is ever needed here. A little peat is all that is wanted. The sea brings an endless store of firewood almost to the door.

Too often, alas! the ebbing tide leaves yet sadder jetsam on the shore—white, still figures, lying face down on the yellow sand; to be lifted reverently, perhaps, but yet by stranger hands, and

Brean Down: Flotsam and Jetsam. 113

committed with brief rites to the corner of the ancient burial-ground on the headland yonder, where “the little grey church on the windy hill” stands among the green graves of centuries, roofless, dismantled, and forlorn.



THE COUNTRY LIFE.

THE man who can look back over thirty years of rural life, of life spent among woods and meadows, has doubtless learnt something at least of the ways of the wild creatures of his district, of its beasts and birds, of its reptiles, and fish, and insects, even of forms of life still lower in the scale. In the works of Nature, her lovers find a never-failing charm. There is no book like hers, as we read it in green field and country lane, in copse, and stream, and hedge-row. There is no voice like hers, as we hear it in the sounds of the wood, in the sounds of the sea, in the sounds of the night. No poet ever breathed such songs. No writer of romance has ever woven such tales of mystery and wonder.

There are few of us probably who, looking back on the country life of our early days, would not be ready to admit that among its pursuits and pleasures, many and various as they were, the art and craft of birds'-nesting stood supreme. It is a pursuit that has a charm peculiarly its own. It may be that, in the days of our youth, the love of having and holding was one chief motive; a love that some of us have not shaken off yet, though perhaps, it is lavished on more useful things. Even the lust of plunder and destruction may have had its weight with us, as we feel sure it has with the village children. Not every nest-robber, it is true, is really a lover of Nature. But the birds'-nester who is a naturalist born soon wakens, not only to the beauty, but to the significance, of his fragile treasures.

Perhaps few young collectors pay much conscious attention to the construction of the nest, or notice how skilfully its materials are made to harmonise with its surroundings, or see how wonderfully some eggs are protected by their colouring. But his would be a dull soul on whom these things did not, sooner or later, make some impression. There are some birds'-nesters who are no longer young—no longer able to climb a tree or ord a

river, to whom, year after year, the season of nests brings new delight; to whom the exquisite workmanship of the chaffinch seems each year more wonderful than ever, and in whose eyes the blue of a song-thrush's egg will never lose its charm.

These two nightjars' eggs, for example, are exquisitely beautiful, with their soft shades of brown and grey, veined like some rare marble. But as you look at them you think less of their beauty than of the moment when, in the corner of the old orchard, the bird got up, almost under your feet, and you watched it sail away to one of the fir-trees in the hedge-row, and crouch down on a low branch to watch your movements. Then, looking down, you saw, on the bare earth, these eggs, so near that another step would have crushed them. This is only a magpie's egg, but the date on it reminds you of that stiff climb up the giant fir-tree in the coppice, when for want of a box to carry them in, you had to bring your spoil down in your cap held between your teeth; while the farmer below shouted encouragingly: "Bring 'em all, "sir; doän't 'ee leave none on 'em. I doän't "want none o' they varmint on my ground."

Here is a kestrel's egg on which there is a date written, and a name—the name of a once-familiar

hill-top. As you look, the scene of long ago comes back. It was an early morning in May. The dew lay heavy on the bracken, whose stout young fronds joined hands across the path. And as you paused on the hill slope and looked back, you saw how all the upland pastures, and the broad meadow lands below, were glistening in the light of the just risen sun. Through the grey haze that veiled the distance showed, faintly and more faint, range after range of low blue hills, with white hamlets glimmering here and there. The light of sunrise had just caught the windows of the old manor house on the slope, some mile away, and they flashed and flamed like fire. The grey cliffs above you had the flush of dawn upon their storm-worn steeps, and the light air tossed the leaves of the wayfaring trees rooted in the crannies, till they glittered like blades of silver. Among the elms about the farmstead, on the knoll below, sounded the uneasy chatter of a magpie. A crow was flying leisurely up to his fastness in the clump of old Scotch firs on the low hill-top. From a belt of coppice further down there rose at intervals, above the low sweet notes of the warblers, the clear call of a cuckoo. Overhead a woodlark drifted in vast circles, singing as he flew.

When at length you gained the hill crest, you heard the challenge of a black-cock. Over the wide pasture the lapwings were calling. Now they wheeled across the pale blue heaven, now they swooped swiftly almost to the ground, turning over and over in the air. Now one flew by, so near that you saw clearly the long plume upon his glossy head, and heard the musical throb of his strong wings sounding loud in the quiet morning air.

As you paused on the short turf close to the brow of the cliff, and looking down once more, saw your shadow falling on the young corn of the ploughed land far below, a hawk dashed out from the cliff below you, and then, staying its swift course, hovered a moment in mid air, while the sunshine lighted up its rich brown plumage. As you peered over the brink of the cliff there were no signs of a nest. But a tall sapling rooted in a ledge some ten feet below looked safe to hold by. Cautiously you slid over the edge, and dropped within reach of the branches, and so, from ledge to ledge, you climbed slowly down, holding on by points of rock or tufts of grass, or stems of ivy, until—yes, there, at your feet, in an arched crevice of the cliff, on a little earth, with no sort of nest,

lay the four exquisite eggs, whose radiant beauty—so much richer five-and-twenty years since—seemed to your enraptured gaze to light up the little hollow. As you stooped to take one of them in your hand—how warm it was—and clung there, gloating over the beauty of your treasure, the old hawk hovered near, sounding at times her wild cry of anger and alarm, answered far off by her fierce mate, hurrying homeward on his swift, keen wings.

It is not given to all alike to be able to appreciate the true pleasure of a country walk. It is a thing that many of us prize, and that even more of us long for. And yet there are some people, really fond of walking, to whom it seems to make little difference whether their road goes evenly along the Queen's highway, and is hemmed in by straight stone walls, or loiters through winding by-ways, under banks crowned with straggling hedge-rows, overhung with sheltering elms. There are those who take their weekly tramp, and who say they like it best so, on Sunday, through the monotonous dreariness of London streets. To them a country walk, with its possible mud, and with its certain solitude and tameness, is, at least in fancy, flat and stale and altogether profitless.

It is largely a matter of training. We may learn to love bricks and mortar and the traffic of the town more than the quiet of woods and meadows, and the companionship of the everlasting hills. But there are others who cannot breathe amid the stir and noise and money-grubbing fever of the city; to whom the air of the open country is the Elixir of Life; who love its restful quietude, and who, at each turn along the favourite path, look for some old friend, some familiar bird, or flower, or insect.

With those who are really fond of rural life, other things have weight besides the mere landscape, besides the beauty of the view or the exhilaration of the keen air of the hill-tops. The charm of woodland walk, of river path, of quiet lanes, or of lonely places in the hills, is increased a hundredfold by some knowledge of rural sights and sounds. A power to recognise the songs of birds, some acquaintance with insect life, a little plant lore, a little knowledge of rocks and fossils—in a word, some tincture of Natural History—combine to make a ramble in the country one of the best things that life can offer us.

This love of Nature is again largely a matter of training. Schoolboys, as a race, are strangely

slow at first to see plants, or shells, or fossils. But the young birds'-nester, for instance, whose first motive was, it may be, nothing nobler than the lust of having and holding, the love of plunder, or even the savage pleasure of destruction, may soon be trained to see the meaning of the shape and tints and markings of the eggs; not only to appreciate the beauty of the nest and the skill with which it was put together, but to learn in time the song of the builder and to know something of its habits. The butterfly hunter may be taught to recognise not merely the beauty of his captives, but to see something of those marvellous devices by which Nature hides caterpillar and chrysalis, and even perfect insect, from prying eyes.

The boy who has acquired a love for Natural History has something to be thankful for, all the days of his life, a possession that may be the means of bringing more comfort to his soul than all the wisdom of the ancients. Of no man can it be so truly said as of the naturalist that he

"Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

It is true enough that, to most men, a knowledge of flowers or fossils, of insect life or of the habits

of birds, will bring no return in hard cash. But there are other things in life besides a balance at the banker's. And a love of art is not more lucrative, or a taste for music or for books.

There are people who, if they would, might do much to aid the study of Natural History; people whose avocations take them much into the open air, and who have opportunities which some of us long for in vain. The fisherman, the keeper, the shepherd, and the farm labourer might, if they could be won over to take interest in such things, contribute not a little to our knowledge of the life history of even the most familiar of animals. Fishermen along the coast see things sometimes the description of which rouses envy in the breasts of less fortunate listeners. Not long since a man was rowing out to his nets in the early morning just outside the bar of a small tidal river in the West Country, when he saw a raven sweeping slowly along the hill-slope near by—the grassy side of a long promontory stretching far out into the sea, muttering to itself at times with that deep voice that, happily, is still familiar to the long-shore dwellers on that coast. Suddenly the bird paused, and with swift descent swooped down among the brown heather and the stunted bushes of the hill,

seizing in its strong claws a hare that had been lying crouched among the herbage. But the bird was too late in using its beak or else missed its stroke altogether, for in a moment the hare and the raven, locked fast together, rolled over and over, kicking, struggling, flapping down the rough slope below; until the bird, dismayed by such an unwonted experience and the buffeting of the rocks and broken ground, let go its hold. The hare was on its feet and had vanished like a flash, while the baffled raven, rising slowly in the air, sailed reluctantly away.

The naturalist is not now, even in country districts, looked upon quite in the same light as he once was—but one degree removed from the state of lunatic. The old order of things, the prejudice, the bigotry, the superstition of half a century ago has to a great degree disappeared. There are many English parishes still without a railway; there is none probably without a newspaper. The presence of a single naturalist, parson or village doctor, or what not, has been known, like the little leaven that leaveneth the whole lump, to rouse a real interest among the neighbours in birds and beasts and even insects. A man's reputation for being fond of strange

creatures may perhaps be laughed at, at first, and perhaps be always a little looked down on. But by degrees, very slow it may be, the influence spreads. The keeper brings him a strange bird, the labourer a nest of dormice found in stubbing up a hedge-row, or a clutch of quails' eggs he has come upon among the clover. The old mole catcher, too, is a very mine of stories about the strange beasts he has seen in his sixty years' experience. One of his most wonderful tales is about the great snake—"more 'n *that* long,"—a matter of five feet or so,—which he killed as it was sucking the milk of a cow: "and" as he will add triumphantly, "there were more 'n a pint of milk in him":—the crushed eggs of the unfortunate reptile no doubt, but it is altogether useless to suggest any such paltry explanation.

One autumn a boy at work among the potatoes turned up with his spade something that instantly, so he declared, became a bird and flew away. The boy ran home in horror. His parents would not believe a word of the story, but the boy was too big to be flogged as a mere liar. They were greatly relieved on learning that something of the kind was at least possible, and regarded with no little interest a Death's Head hawkmoth, for such



A WEST COUNTRY MOLE CATCHER.

no doubt the apparition was, preserved in a collection.

The change from egg to caterpillar is a thing with which every rustic is probably familiar; but in remote rural districts there are still men who cannot believe that a caterpillar can ever become a butterfly, and who still entertain strange superstitions about toads and snakes and slow worms.

Perhaps in time the County Councils may do something for the rustic enlightenment, by means of lectures and the limelight. The rural population is, however, notoriously hard of belief; is the most difficult of all populations to mové from the faiths of their fathers. There is many a farmer's wife even yet who will labour with the churn from morning till night,—lamenting all the while that the butter will not come,—rather than by the use of a thermometer so regulate the temperature that the whole process would be over in half-an-hour. A series of lectures lately given in Somersetshire on the management of farm stock was, however, well attended by the younger farmers at any rate. They were keenly interested, and although they may, perhaps, have mostly adjourned afterwards to discuss each discourse at the public-house, it was

not as sceptics ; and the local ironmonger always found it necessary to lay in a stock of thermometers as soon as the lectures had begun. The older men mostly kept aloof. They had no faith in any new-fangled ways. They are a stiff-necked generation. As their fathers did, so do they. One burly, red-faced farmer of the old school was lately heard to express his contempt for the educational efforts of the County Council. "What be the use," said he, "of wasting the public money sending round men to talk about a dairy as don't know a cow from a elephant ? And these yar cook'ry classes. 'Tis my belief that if a man have got summat to cook, he'll soon find out how to cook un."

With a few popular lectures and a little practical help and guidance the farmer and the farm labourer might render untold service to science, with all their long hours in the open air, summer and winter, seedtime and harvest. They see some strange things now, or think they see them. Snakes are the theme of many marvellous tales. "I were walking along the path through the wheat," said an old villager, "when I heard a rustling, like a robbut: I thought 'twere a robbut. But a gurt viper come out of the

“wheat and jumped across the path so high’s
“my head.”

A captive tortoise escaped one day into the road, and was soon the centre of a knot of astonished villagers. After long debate they concluded it was either “a tremendous gurt toad, “or some wendimous warmint”; and they decided to kill it on the spot—a task of no small difficulty, as may well be imagined.



HALE WELL: A QUIET CORNER.

ON the south slope of an old West Country orchard there is a sheltered corner lying open to the sun. Above it rises a broad, unkempt, straggling hedge-row—holly and hawthorn, bramble and sweetbriar—and behind this again the green slopes of the hill. On the left, rising at intervals through the tangled thickets that form the eastern limit of the orchard, is a line of old Scotch firs, and beyond them, dimly seen through the

haze that broods over the landscape, are the grey ramparts of a range of limestone cliffs. The wind of March is in the dark foliage of the firs, tossing their gnarled arms against the pallid sky. But here the golden blossoms of the gorse, the brown stems of last year's bracken, stand unmoved. The dark firs are stirring with a sound as of the sea, but here, on this sunlit slope, is the very air of summer,

“ the grace,
The golden smile of June,
With bloom and sun in every place,
And all the world in tune.”

Butterflies flit idly by—dark-winged peacocks, soft brown tortoise-shells, pale yellow brimstones like flying gleams of sunshine. The apple boughs are fretted all over with fine points of green, the purple mist round the heads of the great elms deepens in the warm air, the old hedge-row wears already the bright garb of spring. The air is full of spring time, of the breath of primroses and violets, full of pleasant sounds of country life, of the wakening of the world, of the happy voices of a hundred birds, whose glad hearts are revelling in the golden weather.

The birds know well this sunny hollow. Here

spring comes early, and summer lingers late.
While the fields without are white with wintry
rime,

“ . . . here the glancing sunbeams throng,
And tasselled larches droop to hear
A grace of fleeting song.”

To-day, on every side, the feathered woodlanders are stirring. From an old Scotch fir that towers out of the hedge-row—its dark shape showing like a shadow through the leafless boughs of the apple-trees—falls the rich music of a blackbird's song, clear and wild and flute-like. He is a noble singer; less great, indeed, than the song-thrush, but yet a master of his art. And there are those who hold that there is more beauty in the depth and richness, in the power and passion, of his few brief bars, than in all the magnificent anthem of his rival. Farther off, low down in a leafless elm by the border of the orchard, is the thrush himself, flooding the whole glade with his wonderful melody. Over and over there sounds the polished lyric of the wren; over and over again the metallic clink of a coaltit rings out above the plaintive carol of the robin, the sober ditty of the hedge-sparrow. Over all the fields the larks are singing. In the hedges that skirt the orchard sounds the

sweet cadence of the chaffinch, the wild warble of the missel-thrush, at times the ringing call of some light-hearted oxeye. From farther up the hollow, from his sanctuary in the old, neglected wilderness of unpruned, lichen-coated trees, floats down the soft laugh of a woodpecker, a mellow sound, a note of peace and solitude, and sylvan greenness. Is it only fancy that here, among these hills, in this sweet country air, among these untarnished immemorial elms, there is more melody in the skylark's song, that there is a finer tone in the cool, clear singing of the robin, that there is a touch of music in the chatter of the very sparrows? But hark, a fainter note floats lightly down from the tree-tops; a note not strong or musical, but heard through all the blended harmonies of a score of singers. It is the call of the chiff-chaff, the first returning wanderer from the warm south, fresh from the orange groves of Sorrento, or the sunny slopes of the Sabine hills. When his small figure shows presently against the dark foliage of a Scotch fir, there is that about him which seems to suggest that he is well content with his home-coming, even though woods are bare and skies are cheerless. He flutters up and down among the branches, never still for a moment. Even when

he pauses,—looking like a point of light against the sombre leaves behind him,—to call his own name over and over, it is easy to see that his whole small figure is trembling with the ardour of his eager little soul.

A tiny figure, and a simple song. But there is more of meaning in those few faint notes than in all the rest of the great chorus that day by day is gathering strength in the woodland. For in the chiff-chaff's call there is the Promise of Spring. It is said that when the Siberian exiles hear for the first time, after their long and bitter winter, the cry of the cuckoo, the familiar voice rouses in their weary souls a resistless longing to taste once more, if only for a day, the sweets of freedom ; that there are always some who, at the summons, elude the vigilance of their guards, and take to the forest, lured by the magic of that wandering voice. And so, in our hearts, this feeble note rouses a longing for green fields and country lanes, for flowers and sunshine, for summer and the coming of the swallows.

Somewhere in the elms a nuthatch sounds at intervals his flute-like call—a wandering voice, now among the topmost branches, whose sunlit purple holds so well against the pallid blue, now

near the ground, now in some mighty bough that leans far out over the field. Now the bird's figure shows darkly on the sky, and now, as he glides head foremost down, like the born acrobat that he is, his grey plumage lights up for a moment in the sunshine. And now he leaves the tree, still calling as he flies, and sinks down among that grey fringe of orchard, where his mate and he have, perhaps, already fixed on the hole in the old apple tree in which they mean to take up their quarters for the season.

The old hedge-rows round the orchard are but wintry still for the most part, save for a few buds of hawthorn just breaking into leaf, or an elder bush already tinged with green. But on the banks of the tiny stream that wanders leisurely along the lane below, celandine and sweet violet are in bloom; and primroses, no longer pale and stunted, as in the rougher days of March, lend their rare perfume to the air. Meadowsweet and brooklime are springing by the oozy shore, and on the dark boughs of the alders that lean over it the catkins cluster thick.

In a blackthorn bush, whose armed sprays are lightly touched with blossom as with new fallen snow, two wrens alight; two tiny figures,

mere balls of brown feather, so near that every line of the wavy, shell-like marking on their backs is plain to see. Now one of them, poised on a briar stem, breaks suddenly into song, turning from side to side, his wings parted, his atom of a tail expanded to the full. The brief lyric ended, he flies down to join his mate, who waits demurely in the bush below, and for a minute or two they flutter and play, and whisper to each other soft notes of fond endearment—the sweetest bit of love-making imaginable.

Farther on, in a young oak tree in the hedge-row, two blackbirds have alighted. Not lovers, nothing like it, paying no manner of heed to each other's presence. One of them flies down—a splendid figure, with his new black coat, with the bright golden orange of his bill. Instantly the other is down too, in front of him. A moment they stand thus, motionless. Then, with loud notes of challenge, they tilt headlong at each other, beaks down, wings and tail spread wide, their whole dark plumage rough with rage. Again and again they meet in the shock of battle, rushing each on the other's weapon, rising at last into the air, fluttering and fighting, the snapping of their bills heard plainly fifty yards away. Five

minutes only the conflict lasts. More than one historic field has been lost and won in time as brief. It is all over. The victor stands alone upon the grass. His beaten rival is in full flight far down the hedge-row. A moment later the queen of beauty, who from her perch among the blackthorns has watched the tournament unseen, flies down to the hero of her choice. It is the old story; a tale far older than the days of Thais—"None but the brave, none but the brave, none but the brave deserves the fair."

Here in this happy valley there has not been, for weeks past, one clouded hour. March has shown, all through, the temper of the lamb; nor now, in his last hours, does he show signs of changing mood. To seaward it is true the haze deepens to a cold grey fog, and the sullen booming of the distant fog guns is sounding faintly, at intervals, even now. On the hill the lapwings are calling, their plaintive voices softened by the distance, and at times their dark figures show against the pale blue sky, as they rise and fall above the limestone cliffs that skirt the hill.

Yonder crow, drifting up the slope, keeping low down, as if fearing to be seen, is making for

his fastness among the fir-trees on the hill-crest higher up. He may well keep out of sight. Only last week two lambs were found in a field near the crow's nest, dying, with their eyes torn out. And the magpie, chuckling now and then in doubtful tone, somewhere at the foot of the orchard, has here a reputation almost as much blown upon. Terrible fellows, both of them, in lambing time or in the poultry yard. But they have been working hard and honestly enough all the rest of the year. Some people seem to think that the destruction of a chicken or two, or the theft of a few eggs, far outweighs a whole year of good deeds—the slaughter of unnumbered grubs, wire-worms, mice, and beetles.

At regular intervals, a few seconds apart, there sounds from a tall ash tree in the hollow the drone of a greenfinch, monotonous and unmusical. Was there ever such a drowsy sound? And yet when he breaks off presently in a stave of his own wild song, his voice is one of the sweetest of sweet sounds, a light and breezy ripple of love and sun and happiness. Pleasant, too, are the notes of the chaffinches that flit in and out of the hedge-row. And never surely was there sweeter black-bird's song than that wild lyric sounding now

among the trees that overhang the well. In the top of the great elm that leans over the orchard stile there is such a chorus of tongues, such a babel of linnet and blackbird, of sparrow and jackdaw, with intervals of untuneful chattering, whistling, piping, that you fancy twenty performers at the least. But it is only a starling telling all the world in his quaint way of his joy in this unwonted sunshine. Now he breaks off into the song of a swallow, copied from the life. He may have heard it this very morning. Or it may be merely that the impulse of the spring time rouses in his heart a memory of the long absent wanderer, just as on rough days of autumn you may hear him mock the curlew's cry because the wind is roaring like the sea.

A very real note of spring is the hum of that burly bumble-bee sailing along the hedge-row in search of some convenient hollow, some abandoned mouse-hole it may be, in which to build her nest. Her nest, not his, or theirs. She has no mate. He died in the autumn, and on her alone devolves the labour of rearing the new generation.

Among the stones that years of patient toil have heaped under this straggling hedge-row, the long-hidden slaves of Nature are broad

awake and busy, revelling in the brightness of these delightful days. A crowd of insects, flies, and bees, and beetles are coming out of their long hiding to sun their stiffened limbs. Butterflies flit lightly down the hedge-row, some newly waked from sleep, and some that have but just broken the dry husk of their chrysalis condition, and are spreading for the first time their beautiful wings.

To the lover of the sights and sounds of Nature, life has few better things to offer than a quiet hour, some bright spring morning, under the shadow of a green arch of blossomed boughs, in company with gentle, beautiful, sweet-voiced poets of the air, glad, like him, in the sunshine and the fragrance. Is it a mere flight of fancy that the feathered architects, no less than the ballad singers, of this out-of-the-way corner of the world are masters of their art above the birds of less favoured regions? Look at this chaffinch's nest, cradled in the end of an apple-bough, so dexterously woven in among the twigs in which it rests, so daintily touched with silvery points of lichen, so perfect a harmony with its surroundings that one might well fancy it had grown there, some strange product of

the tree. While just above it, an apple bough in bloom, the rich gold of clustered stamens just showing through the white and pink of still half-open flowers, lends the crowning touch of beauty.

Few birds, perhaps, have employed more curious decoration than a pair of hedge sparrows, who, this spring, attached to their nest with strands of bass a label, bearing in large letters the legend, **"Early English."** In a crevice of the old wall, just outside the orchard, is the work of another master-builder, a wren. The dry grass and skeleton leaves of its framework match exactly with the weather-worn and lichen-stained masonry about it. And slender sprays of ivy, clinging to the rough surface of the stone, spread round it their beautiful young leaves. Another wren's nest, in an old stump, just filling a space among great grey ivy stems, is built wholly of moss, so fresh and green, so true a copy of the natural growths on the dead wood, that the eye would hardly have discovered it, had not the little architect itself betrayed it. But there is a third wren's nest, in the old cart-shed in the corner of the orchard, that surpasses even these. It is built of dry grass, in the straw of the thatch, framed by

the rough rafters, and around it, and over it, there hang down as if to hide it the threshed-out ears that have been left upon the straw. And within the small round entrance is the builder's tiny head, her bright eyes showing plainly in the ring of shadow. Wrens are among the shyest and most fastidious of birds. Many a one has abandoned her nest, and all the eggs in it, because some curious passer-by has touched it in her absence, never so gently. But this one, as if confiding in the honour of her visitors, sits on unmoved. There is a ring-dove's nest quite low down in a holly tree in the orchard hedge, and not only will the bird allow you to stand beneath and watch her, but when, a few days since, a ladder was placed against the tree, she waited until she was within arm's reach before she left her nest. She made a fine picture as she sat there, proudly unconscious of the intruders, not even deigning to turn her head to look at them, the soft lavender of her beautiful plumage relieved by the clouding of white feathers on her neck. At length she could bear it no longer. She went crashing off through the holly twigs, her great wings clattering as she flew. So shallow and insecure was the frail platform on

which she had been sitting, that her sudden start threw one of her two nestlings over the side. It was handed up again, apparently none the worse for its adventure; and the two youngsters crouched trembling in the slight hollow; two blind, helpless, hideous, evil-looking little creatures; a whole world of difference between them and the stately, fearless bird who, a minute before, had covered them with the shadow of her wings.

More fearless still is a blue-tit that has her dwelling in a crevice in the wall some fifty yards further on. It is a tiny hole, and the nest is far in, but you can see her sitting there, her pretty head and one of her bright eyes just showing over the mossy rim. She is not in the least shy of being looked at. Indeed, if you touch her nest with a straw she will spar at it and hiss, making a noise for all the world like the spitting of an angry kitten, even coming to the door to storm at the intruder, but without the least idea of leaving her unprotected offspring to his mercy.

But other tenants of the hollow revel in the sunshine besides the birds and the bees and the butterflies. These straggling hedge-rows are

the haunt of finch and blackbird. Crow and magpie and squirrel hide their homes among the thick foliage of the firs. Nightjars love this quiet corner, and the nuthatch and the wryneck find sanctuary in the hollows of the trees. But the stony bank along the hedge, sweet now with violets, and strewn with stars of celandine spreading wide their golden petals to the sun, is of all spots the viper's favourite haunt.

All along the bank and far in among the thickets are heaped fragments of red sandstone that by slow degrees have been cleared from these sterile pastures. The sun is on them from dawn till sunset. They are quite hot to the touch. Here, then, the viper loves to lie, warming his cold heart upon the heated stone. On a day like this he is wide awake, quick in his movements, and off like a flash, especially if once alarmed. Slowly, silently, with stealthy steps must you approach his haunt.

There he is, loosely coiled against a flat slab of sandstone, his cold, unwinking eye set in a fixed stare, looking straight this way. The broad zigzag stripe along his back is boldly drawn on the pale brown of his coat. Plain even at this distance

is the V-like mark upon his head. But he has begun to move. Before you can reach him he has vanished among the stones. There is nothing for it but to sit down a few yards away, hidden by a dwarf blackthorn bush, and wait patiently for his re-appearing. How quiet it all is. The hamlet on the hill-slope yonder—

“One of those little places that have run
Half up the hill beneath a burning sun,
And then sat down to rest, as if to say,
‘I climb no further upward, come what may’”—

looms faintly through the haze. The white houses scattered through the valley melt away into the mist. But the sun is still warm. The cones of the old firs crackle in the sunshine. Still sweeter grows the faint perfume of the gorse, still more beautiful its radiant gold. A bullfinch settles in a tree hard by. There is no colour in Nature more beautiful than the exquisite flush of crimson on his breast. Quite in keeping with his beauty is the soft sweetness of the tender love note that now and then he whispers to his mate, who, in colours far less bright than his, sits just below him on a lichened apple bough. Hark! a faint sound among the dry brambles on the bank, a long rustle, and then through the blackthorn

stems the slender shape of the viper glides softly down to the warm stones.

Here he comes, gliding boldly from his harbour in the bank. His brown mail glistens in the sun, his red eyes glance swiftly right and left, his long tongue flickers through his fast shut lips. He coils his long body round between two stones, whose warm red seems warmer still to-day, fitting himself comfortably in the angle of the stones, there he lies motionless. Small beetles creep over him unseen and unregarded. He pays no heed when a butterfly settles close by him to sun its splendid wings. But he is broad awake.

Now move slowly towards the spot. Some sound startles him. He lifts his head and gives a swift glance this way. He is going. Twitch him out on the grass with your stick, hold him down a moment, and then, watching your opportunity, take him up by the tail. An angry beast he is, hissing and struggling, making vain attempts to reach his captor's hand. He can only lift his head a few inches, and there is no fear at all of his doing any harm. There is no doubt about the harm he can do. A viper's bite, especially in hot weather, is painful enough, though seldom

dangerous. But the farmer who comes up at this moment eyes the captive with grim satisfaction. Heifers, he says, are often bitten, even horses. "Doän't 'ee let un go," he adds anxiously; "I doän't like none o' they beasts about."



THE GREENWOOD TREE.

IT is a very blaze of sunshine that fills the open spaces of the wood. The tall ash saplings that join hands across the path, now almost lost among the briar sprays, the trailing woodbine, and the long arms of wandering bryony, sway slowly in the hot and heavy air. But the stir of the leaves that flutter lightly overhead, their green lacework all dark against the summer sky, is a restful, soothing sound.

It is a pleasant relief to turn aside a little from the pathway, to wade breast high through the green jungle of the underwood to a little place out of the sunshine, a hollow walled half way round by a line of low grey rocks, almost hidden by thick tapestries of ivy. Two noble trees that stand on either side, two stately Spanish chestnuts, spread their arms over it, as if in benediction. Overhead, their

“ . . . dark foliage interweaves
In one unbroken roof of leaves,
Underneath whose sloping eaves
The shadows hardly move.”

A cool and quiet spot. Like the poet who found it pleasant, through the loopholes of retreat, “To see the tumult and not feel the stir,” we too, from the kindly shadow of these great chestnut trees, can look out on the woodland in its pride of summer glory, with its flowers and its fragrance and its greenness, nor feel the heat and glare and the pitiless weight of the sunshine.

Day after day, week after week, there has been

“ . . . that nameless splendour everywhere
That makes the passers in the city street
Congratulate each other as they meet.”

Yet perhaps the full beauty of such weather, its

wealth of flowers and foliage, its abundance of bird and insect life, above all its half-tropic heat, is for the country rather than the town. Among stone walls and pavements summer days are too often weariness, and summer nights but stifling. In the country the glare of noon is tempered by cool winds, softened by grass and foliage. There, too, the hot air of night is sweetened with the breath of honeysuckle and jasmine; and through wide open windows the scent of the roses floats up to us

“Like sweet thoughts in a dream.”

If the town is close and sultry, woodland and green lane are at their best and sweetest. In the country at any rate—

“There is no price set on the lavish summer,
And June may be had by the poorest comer.”

Though the flowers of May have passed into a proverb, it is June after all that gives to the fields and by ways their crowning grace and beauty. May draped all the trees with fresh young foliage, deepened April's mist of bluebells, and whitened the hedge-rows with blossoming hawthorn. May was a month of broad effects and lavish colouring. Here she silvered a whole field with daisies, as

with a light fall of snow. And here, like a cunning alchemist, she changed with her buttercups the green of a rich pasture-land to a blaze of living gold. But there is yet more of beauty in the fields of June. Even in the Tropics, travellers tell us, there is nothing so superbly beautiful as an English midsummer meadow—whether an upland pasture, with its hawkweed and lotus, its scented grasses and sweet clover blooms; or a low-lying field along some loitering stream, where, in the swampy soil, among the tasselled sedges, spring fiery spikes of orchis, foamy meadow-sweet, and tall flower-de-luce.

If June is the most flowery of months, May is certainly the most musical. The days are drawing near when there will settle on the green world of woods and lanes and meadows the silence of the summer. The grey dawn is still almost as full as ever of sweet sounds. The songs of thrush and blackbird are still glorious in the evening twilight. Wren and robin still sing to us at intervals from dawn to sunset. But through the long hours of daylight we miss already the notes of many a wandering singer, for whom June is the limit of the season. Already the cuckoo's voice is breaking. We have but another week, at the farthest, of the

nightingale's song. His is a superb and matchless melody. Many a time, it is true, have the notes of thrush or blackcap, or even of sedge-warbler, been mistaken for it. Sweet singers, all of them. Yet it is strange that anyone who has ever fairly listened to the chief of song could confuse with his magnificent strains the note of the most musical of thrushes.

But it is to singers less skilled and less famous than the nightingale that the woodland owes its greatest charm: light wingèd dryads of the trees, without whose songs and call notes, and mere life and movement, the lover of Nature thinks that "summer is not summer, nor can be." The willow-warbler's song, a little careless cadence of soft notes that at intervals seems to filter lightly down among the branches, is the very soul of sunshine and sweet air. The wood wren's call is like no other sylvan sound. Its plaintive, long-drawn, monotonous notes, often growing louder towards the close, are sometimes so sonorous and far-reaching that it is hard to credit they can come from so diminutive a singer. His actual song is a little gush of simple notes again and again repeated, from his perch on the end of some leafless bough high up among the trees.

It is not remarkable for melody, though now and then there is a very real touch of sweetness in it, and after the first rather deliberate beginning it is so hurried as to give the listener the impression that the bird is trying to crowd twenty notes into a single beat.

The whitethroat is another hasty singer, but he has a greater gift of music, and his manner of singing—sometimes taking short flights into the air the while, and then diving back into the thicket—his quick movements, the almost luminous whiteness of his swelling throat, rank him among the most charming of woodlanders. Yet his haunt is rather on the skirts of the wood than in the heart of it. He is still more a roadside singer, and greatly given to building his frail nest of grass in the thorny depths of some old hedge-row, or even among the nettles on the bank.

But of all the sylvan minstrels the blackcap has, after the nightingale, the most silvery tongue, and we hear so much more of him in the country generally—not only is he more widely distributed, but he sings again when his brood are fledged and flown, which the nightingale never does—that to most of us he is much the more familiar,

perhaps we might even say he is more highly prized than the acknowledged chief of song himself. Watch him now, before household cares have for the time taken up all his care and attention. See him balanced, with his breast of tender grey, his black crest slightly lifted, on a spray of briar that, swaying underneath his weight, trembles with the energy of his wild and mellow notes—now clear and loud, and reaching, it may be, far beyond the limits of the wood; now tender and soft and low, and low and lower yet, until at a yard's distance hardly heard. A beautiful song. A song that to White of Selborne, as doubtless to many a Nature lover since his day, always brought back with its wild sweetness the lines of Amien's song:

“Under the greenwood tree,
Who loves to lie with me
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat:
Come hither, come hither, come hither.”

A bird flies into the tree near by. A blue-tit, smartest of his race. He stands a moment on the edge of a hole in the level bough, looks round twice, then dives in and disappears. And out of that stronghold of his, snugly lined with moss, and

hair, and feathers, he will not stir for you or any man. But yonder is a figure, in a tree some twenty yards away, from which perhaps even the bold blue-tit would fly in terror. A lithe brown creature is climbing leisurely out of a hole high up in the trunk—a weasel, searching for eggs, no doubt. Up the tree he goes, more lightly even than a squirrel, right to the very topmost branches. Now down he comes again, head first, and makes his way to another tree. As he canters lightly through the long grass he pauses now and then to rear on his hind legs and peer sharply round over the green jungle, looking for the moment, quite bird-like. Two more trees he climbs, searching every likely spot among the boughs, prying into every hole and cranny—clearly a birds'-nester born. A master of woodcraft, too, for when you move nearer for a better view, he vanishes. He is there all right, lying close behind some branch, no doubt; but he is as completely screened from sight as if he wore the magic cap of Perseus. He is a tiny figure at the most. The birds take no notice of him. The yellow-hammer goes on with his sleepy tune, and the greenfinch in the elm above him with his yet sleepier drawl, while a linnet in the tree near by

sings undisturbed his sweet and dainty song, that in itself is like a gleam of sunshine.

The whole woodland is astir with life and movement and sweet sounds of song. Look at that bullfinch yonder, balanced on a spray of woodbine, that swings lightly beneath his weight. Leaning forward a little, with his black head turned slightly on one side, he picks off, as if in pure mischief, the dainty tufts that cluster on the branches near him, while the ruined leaves fall in a very shower. A beautiful figure. There is not in Nature a hue more lovely than the exquisite flush of crimson on his breast. Close by him, as if by way of foil to his perfect beauty, sit two sober-clad companions, dull and grey and colourless, yet to the full as mischievous as he.

Sunny spaces in the wood are filled with hovering insects, whose tiny figures rise and fall like motes in the warm air; beetles for the most part, not flies; small, black, long-bodied beetles, the very same that give us such annoyance by getting in our eyes in the twilight.

Butterflies cross and recross the clearing—some so brilliant in their whiteness that they almost suggest yet brighter gleams of sunshine. Some,

again, are dark and sombre, and like patches of moving shadow. Now one brave in black and scarlet flashes past. Now one on wings of golden brown sails leisurely along. And some there are, small, sylph-like figures, that float lightly by, as blue as the unclouded heaven overhead. Some moths, too, are abroad, even at this hour and in this fierce sunshine—moths clad in the very softest tints, the most ethereal tones of fawn and grey, of brown and yellow. Some are without a mark on their pure colouring, and some are daintily pencilled with shell-like lines and bars. To and fro in the sunbeams, whose misty shafts slant through the thickets, hover a crowd of wingèd things—of great bees, black or yellow or tipped with fiery red, flies of many hues, beetles light and dark—and the sound of their multitudinous wings seems to fill the hot summer air. Insects make up no small part, perhaps even the larger part, of the life of the woodland.

The woods just now are swarming with caterpillars, many of which, perhaps even the majority, belong to the class called geometers, from the curious way in which they move along, arching their bodies in a fashion that reminds the observer

of a man measuring a distance by “spanning” it with his hand. A much more curious point about them is their wonderful mimicry of the twigs of the tree on which they live: a fact which has earned for them the name of “stick” caterpillars. Their skins are the colour of the bark, their bodies have knots and markings exactly like twigs. And when one of them waits motionless, standing erect on its hinder set of feet—an attitude it can preserve for hours together, it looks so like a piece of stick that even a naturalist has related how he was about to prune a twig from one of his fruit trees, and had even touched it with his knife before he saw that it was not vegetable at all, but one of these “stick” caterpillars. One cannot help wondering if birds are taken in too.

The curious movements of these geometers are due to their comparatively scant supply of legs. There is an amusing ballad called “The Bishop and the Caterpillar,” which describes, after the manner of “Ingoldsby,” how a great dignitary of the Church inspected a village school. The children acquitted themselves well:—

“ For the Bishop, to his great pleasure, found
That they knew the date when our Queen was crowned,
And the number of pence which make up a pound ;

And the oceans and seas which our island bound ;
That the earth is nearly, but not quite, round ;
Their orthography, also, was equally sound."

The gratified examiner, declaring that it was only fair for the scholars to have their turn, proposed they should question him. A small boy in the audience, unawed even by a Bishop, instantly

. raised his head
And abruptly said :
How many legs has a caterpillar got ? "

Here was a poser indeed. Kings of Israel, now, his lordship might have known ; very likely the date of the Second Punic War ; perhaps even some of the counties of England. But caterpillars were beyond his ken. It was to no purpose that he privately invoked, under cover of making a speech, the aid of the rector, of the curates, of the schoolmaster. Not one of them knew. In vain was the beadle sent out in hot haste to interrogate passers-by. He returned disconsolate, and whispered to the anxious Bishop " Nobody knows." In the end the questioner himself supplied the information, and

" . . . with a countenance gay,
Said ' Six, for I counted 'em yesterday.' "

It rather spoils the point of the story that, although

caterpillars have indeed, on one-half of the body, the six legs of the perfect or winged condition, most of them have ten more, very substantial ones too, on the other half, making not six, but sixteen. Some, indeed, have only fourteen; while these geometers are driven to adopt the attitudes they do because they have to shuffle along as best they can, on no more than ten legs altogether.

There are few points of brighter colour among the world of green. Not many brilliant flowers grow well in the very heart of the woods. Along the paths there is a fringe of hawkweed and crow-foot and yellow cistus. And where the sunlight is less broken by the trees there are patches of red lychnis and tall crowns of white cow parsley. In the clearings strawberries run riot, in flower still, but with scantier harvest than usual of the small sweet fruit, in whose pleasant flavour is a dash of woodland wildness. There is honeysuckle everywhere, trailing on the ground, creeping among the bushes, and climbing up out of the green tangle, laying hold of trees and saplings to help it to the light. And as it climbs it twines with fatal clasp about the friendly stems, slowly tightening its embrace, sometimes cutting deep into the wood,

sometimes even killing the branch outright, and going up until at times a green canopy of it crowns boughs thirty feet above the ground, while its flowery clusters scent the woodland. And as evening darkens, "What time the blackbird pipes "to vespers from his perch," when the heat of the long summer day gives place to the cooler, sweeter air of night, the fragrance grows until the whole glade is conscious of its subtle charm. Briar bushes there are in plenty, and some of them are lightly set with delicate blossoms. But the dog-roses are at their best, not here, but on the skirts of the wood, where the long, swaying sprays are crowded with those sweetest flowers of June.

But the glory of the woodland is in its trees; in its sturdy oaks, and stately beeches, its old Scotch firs and graceful larch trees. There is no season when the larch is without some charm. It is beautiful in the springtime, when its sprays are set with exquisite red blossoms, like fairy jewel-work. It is beautiful when among soft tufts of green the brown cones harden in the pleasant sun of May. It is beautiful now, when the flowing, feathery plumes wear the soberer hue of summer. Nor is the beauty greatly less

when, in the chill autumn days, that hue changes slowly into yellow. Nor is it wholly lost, even in the dead of winter, when, in the frosty sunshine, the bare boughs seem to glow like gold against the pale blue sky.

The mist of bluebells, that lingered here so late, has vanished. The fiery spikes of early orchis are all spent and faded. The 'lords and ladies' have given place to little clusters of green berries, that these sunny days will swiftly ripen to red beads of coral. Yet there are other flowers, with even more of beauty, that love the greater heat of summer. Few are more lovely than the white butterfly orchis; fewer still more fragrant. It has allies that mimic with marvellous faithfulness the forms of bees and flies and spiders. They are plants of the heath, of the sunny meadow, and the open hill. But here is one, perhaps the least striking of the clan, that will flourish in the shadow, and that grows well even here in the half twilight of the trees. The quiet-coloured petals of the tway-blade are not like fly or bee or any insect. Each floweret on its plain, unscented spike is the little green figure of a man, a man with outstretched arms. One might almost fancy that the plant was copying shapes long

lost to our dulled vision; that this quiet nook
was not alone

“ for pretty cares
With mate and nest,
A lurking-place of tender airs
From south and west ; ”

but that it was peopled still by the green-clad
gnomes of old belief; that these woodland aisles
were even now a place

“ Where elves hold midnight revel,
And fairies linger still.”



CHILL OCTOBER.

IT is the heavy rain no less than the chilly air, the wet days as well as the frosty nights, which have earned for October its added name, and which mark this month so clearly as the real end of a season. We often get a long spell of warm weather in September; it may linger even over the opening of October; but it is October that sets for good and all its fiery seal upon the ruins of the summer. Yet October has been a delightful month; a month of golden dawns, bright days, and fiery sunsets. And it is closing with quiet moonlight nights under whose gauzy veil the landscape lies transfigured, and far hills show faintly as through mists of dreamland.

This is St. Martin's Summer :

“The summer and the winter here
Midway a truce are holding.
A soft, consenting atmosphere
Their tents of peace enfolding.”

The colours of the leaves, that so long seemed cold and sullen, are swiftly changing in the sharpening air of night. Among the tattered foliage there broaden, day after day, gleams of that fiery splendour that in a few weeks will flare through the length and breadth of the woodland, like the afterglow of summer. The few last leaves of the wild cherry shine like fire in the coppice, and the horse chestnuts in the meadow are all gold from base to crown. Dead leaves lie thick upon the rustling pathway, where brown of oakleaf, crimson of beech, russet of maple, and gold of elm, lends each its own particular note of colour to the splendid carpet; while the foliage of the sycamore, still clinging to its brilliant stalks, is painted with such varied tints, such greens and browns, such inky blacks and flaming yellows, that one might almost fancy some young dryad had been wandering through the woodland with her brush and had tried her colours on the leaves.

So bright the days have been, so warm is the lingering sunshine, that even the thrush has been trying over his old sweet songs, yet to airs so quiet and subdued that they seemed but a reverie of springtime. All day the robin sings. He is the minstrel of the autumn. Now when other birds are silent his voice rings clear through the deserted woods, and we realise more fully how passing sweet are his familiar melodies.

There are few signs of life among the autumn trees. The jays wrangle as they gather the acorns, and at times a troop of fieldfares chatter as they pass. But the sounds of the October woodland are the patter of falling leaves—now filling the air like rain, and now whirled along the path in fiery eddy; the rush of the wind among the rocking tops; and now and then the creak of branches interlocked, that chafe and fret almost with a cry of pain, such as in old days, ere Pan was dead, startled the woodcutter on the slopes of Apennine.

We wander in the woods, however, with senses unattuned to sights and sounds about us. Had we but eyes we could not fail to see some life stirring even now. Were our ears but trained aright we should be aware of ceaseless sounds of

movement. The birds are here, had we but the gift to see them. If no ringdove coos in the shadow of the pines, we may hear as our footsteps rustle on the leafy ways, the crash of wings among distant branches. If no woodpecker's shout breaks in upon the stillness, we may watch the silent figure of the forester in green close crouched against the giant elm. If no magpie chatters in the tree-tops we may at least catch a glimpse of black and white plumage as the wary old campaigner dives into the thickets. This old fir just off the pathway, with its close growing foliage and its canopies of ivy and woodbine, is a screen at once from the wind and the keen eyes of the woodlanders. In its shadow we may stand aside and watch the life of the woods go by, perhaps even overhear some of the secrets of the

“Light wingèd dryads of the trees.”

Jays, that just now were busy over the acorns, are moving leisurely down the slope, absorbed in gossip, wholly unconscious of any spectator of their movements. There is a wide difference between the quick, impetuous actions of a startled jay, on the look-out for danger, and his lazy, loitering manner when he is quite at his ease, and

thinks no one is watching him. Now, as they come nearer, they break into a chorus of loud, harsh notes, mingling with their own wild sylvan speech scraps borrowed from magpie and missel-thrush. Now one mimics the hoarse cry of a crow just sailing over. Now they all join in a babel of odd, inarticulate, indescribable sounds. Still nearer they come. Suddenly one alights close by, three yards off at farthest. He is off again in a moment, too scared to speak. Here comes another. He, too, settles near, but notices nothing. What a handsome fellow he is ! What a splendid touch of blue there is in his wing—a blue such as no sapphire or lapis or turquoise could really rival for a moment. His crest is slightly lifted ; the sunlight glistens on his polished bill. Easily he sways on a tall ash sapling, looking idly round. Suddenly he starts—is gone. One by one his comrades reach the tree. One after one the startled birds take wing again and vanish in the thickets. The rustle of their quick movements dies away. Their clamorous cries grow fainter, and then cease. Silence settles down once more—the silence of a sleep.

The sharp touch of winter in October has changed the whole face of things. Cold and

wind and wet have set their mark alike on woodland and on garden border. Everywhere there is change. The birds of summer have all left us. No bee or wasp is stirring. In this pallid sunshine are no gnats to poise in cloudy column. No moths hover on quivering wings among the ruined flowers. Of the shy four-footed creatures of whose lives we know so little, some are still broad awake and busy, caring nothing for the cold; but some have already entered on their winter sleep. The dormouse is rolled in his snug ball of moss, the hedgehog is buried in his bed of leaves. Grass-snake and viper have crawled away into warm hiding places in banks or among the roots of trees. The frog has buried himself in his cold bed of mud at the bottom of the pond. The toad has squeezed his burly figure into a hole in a tree stump, or under some sheltering stone. It is the fondness of the toad for hiding in holes and corners—not only in winter, but to some extent all the year—which has given rise to so many marvellous tales of the discovery of toads in the heart of trees or in solid blocks of marble. Toads may often be found in holes. But never yet was one found living in any cavity whatsoever where there was no communication with the outer

world, no chink through which insects might make their way after the manner of the fly into the parlour of the spider.

Long before the frosts of October, and while the weather was still warm and sunny, snails were to be seen collected in hundreds on the fences of fields and lanes—on their way, no doubt, to winter quarters. Though whether they expected to find suitable lodgings up there at the tops of the palings, or whether they were only sunning themselves for the last time before crawling down to earth to bury themselves in the holes into which the posts were driven, is perhaps less clear.

Some few snails are provided already with close-fitting doors. Others will seal up their gates with a temporary barricade, behind which they will sleep until the trumpet-call of spring shall break on their dull senses. Do they dream, these snails? Do visions of plump cabbages and brilliant dahlias flit through their molluscous minds? Do they in slumber enjoy again the midnight raid upon the marrow-bed, or cry havoc on the choicest lilies of the garden?

There is a strange stillness in the woods these autumn days; a mournful silence, as of regret for the lost summer. The birds are quiet; the insects,

whose life and beauty lent so much to the brightness of the summer, are dying in the sharpening air, or are creeping away to hide themselves for the winter. October is a fatal month for the lower forms of life. The different species of our native insects are numbered by tens of thousands, and of the myriads of these with which the air of August, and even of September, teemed, only a few, a very few, will survive the chillier dawns and sunsets of this month, which marks the limit of their lives. At the best their lives are brief. The lives of insects, in their perfect condition, are more often numbered only by months, or even weeks: while the little sad-coloured stone-flies that haunt the banks of streams, entering on their last stage without mouths, spend only a few days of strange existence; and there are other flies which, born after sunset and dying before sunrise, never see the full light of day at all.

Those insects which survive the winter do so as a rule by retiring into the shelter of buildings, into crevices in walls, or into hollow trees, and there remaining, motionless and apparently lifeless, all through the cold season, coming out again at the return of spring. Some butterflies are especially fond of taking up their quarters for the

winter in the roofs of houses ; and the cornices of unoccupied rooms seem particularly favourite resting-places. There is a case on record in which a Small Tortoiseshell butterfly, having entered a church during service-time one Sunday in August, settled calmly on a rafter over the heads of the congregation, closed its wings, and then and there took up its quarters for the season. It was happily beyond the reach of the verger's broom, though under the eyes of the clergyman,—himself a naturalist, and there it hung, week after week, all the winter through. At length, on a warm Sunday in May, after a sleep of just nine months' duration, the little creature opened its wings again and fluttered down from its perch, "apparently as fresh in colour and condition as if just out of the chrysalis.

In the same way another of the race flew into a sitting-room in a little country town, one day during the hot weather of September, and finally established itself in the cornice, where for six long months it hung motionless. One fine morning in the following March it was fluttering at the window. The sash was lifted. The little creature dashed out into the sunshine, almost with the speed of a swallow.

A striking feature of the autumn garden some years is the multitude of sober-coloured moths hovering among the flower-beds, morning, noon, and night. The moths themselves not only do no harm in the garden, but are of no small service to the gardener by carrying pollen on their tufted heads from flower to flower, and thus unconsciously fertilising many a blossom that might otherwise have borne no seed at all. But it is quite otherwise with the caterpillars, insignificant but noxious little grubs, which, in some seasons, appear in such hosts as to devastate whole fields. In Germany it has been found necessary to use a machine, drawn by horses, to sweep up these caterpillars, which are collected from it in sacks and then destroyed.

The perfect insect, the commonest perhaps of all the moths, is a beautiful little creature, though there is nothing striking in its colouring. It is known as the "Silver Y," from a conspicuous mark on each of its front wings. Its scientific name of "Gamma" has been given to it from another and more learned reading of the letter.

It has been found very difficult to bestow a rational English "popular name" on each of the

two thousand species of moths that inhabit these islands. Some of the names, indeed, appear almost, if not quite, meaningless, while some, on the other hand, are highly appropriate. The Humming-bird Hawk moth is marvellously like the bird whose name it bears, as every one must admit who watches it poise with outstretched trunk before a flower, on wings that move so swiftly that they show like a halo round it. Two other Hawk moths are called Elephants, but this is because of the strange-looking head of the caterpillar, which can be extended like a sort of dwarf proboscis. Another moth, the Death's Head, bears a skull and cross-bones on its back.

The moths of the large class known as Geometers are so called because the caterpillars, as they loop themselves along, have the air of measuring the space they traverse, as a man might span it with his hand. The Tiger is a moth of brilliant colouring. The Widow and the Old Lady are clad in sombre hues. The Quakers are mostly dressed in soft shades of sober brown, while the sixteen varieties of Footmen wear among them almost as many varieties of livery.

Such names might, indeed, give rise to misconception. We can well understand the feelings of the old market-woman who, toiling up the steep path through the wood with her eggs and butter, overheard a party of schoolboys talking over their captures of the day. We can picture her dismay as she heard one youngster describe how he had chased a small Elephant through the wood, and just missed capturing a Tiger. We can imagine her alarm at hearing another boy boast of having killed two Quakers and a Footman. And how, at a distant shout from another member of the party that he had just knocked down an Old Lady, she dropped her basket and fled for her life.

But of all the signs in Nature's calendar that mark, like figures on a dial, the movement of the seasons, there is none more certain, none more full of mournful augury, than the passing of the birds.

Their going is secret, silent; they vanish unseen and unheard. We have learnt much in recent years with regard to migration. With one single exception, we know where every one of the summer migrants goes to rear its brood. The haunt of one only—the curlew-sandpiper—still defies discovery.

But there is as much cause for wonder as ever that the stork and the swallow observe the time of their coming. And how some birds contrive to find their way over vast stretches of unbroken sea is as great a mystery as when Anacreon saw the

“Cranes from hoary winter fly,
To flutter in a kinder sky ;”

or when the Hebrew watched the wandering hawk stretch her wings toward the south.

Among the few sounds that break the stillness of the autumn night is a faint and hurried cry, that at times may be heard out of the darkness—the note of some bird passing over unseen. It is the cry of the redwing—a feeble note, and yet the very trumpet-call of coming winter. In the spring the sight of the first swallow raises hopes of better times, of sunshine and warm weather. In autumn this voice calling out of the dark is a warning that cold and hunger are driving the redwing from its Northern home, that the Arctic night is settling down among the Norway hills.

Vast indeed is the array of these feathered fugitives. And if most of us see but little of plover or wild duck, of goose or swan or sand-piper, we may perhaps hear them as they pass.

Often in the silence of these autumn nights, or even when the wind is blowing, we may hear the swift flight of the mallard overhead, or the musical voices of plovers; perhaps at times the trumpet-notes of geese, or even the whistling of the whooper's wings. Now and then, too, there floats down out of the starlit stillness the wild call of some unknown bird, the voice of some nameless stranger crying in the dark:

“And with no language but a cry.”



TURF MOOR: A HAPPY HUNTING GROUND.

THE traveller who at this season of the year is whirled along the iron highway of the northern part of Somersetshire will perhaps be led to form but a poor opinion of West Country scenery, for he sees little from the rail of the heath-covered heights of Exmoor, of the wooded glens of Quantock, or of the green heart of Mendip. The line is laid for many miles across a wide stretch of low-lying moorland—so low that it

would be flooded each high tide were it not for the old sea wall by the shore. There are parts of the monotonous expanse that may well remind the wayfarer of the opening lines of one of Ingoldsby's ballads:

"O, Salisbury Plain is bleak and bare,
At least so I've heard many people declare,
For I fairly confess that I never was there.
Not a shrub nor a tree, nor a bush can you see,
No hedges, no ditches, no gates, no stiles,
Much less a house or a cottage for miles."

There are indeed parts of this great plain that are almost absolutely bare of timber save for a few scanty rows of pollard willow trees. There are hardly any hedge-rows, there are few gates, and fewer stiles. The cottages are far apart, built only on the low risings—once islands in the Severn sea, which the moorfolk fondly call "hills," because they are not "drowned out" in flood time.

Yet there is one striking difference. The Somersetshire marshes—far more level than the green waves of the great Wiltshire Down—are cut up by a network of innumerable ditches, narrow indeed, yet not always easily passed, as the little army of King Monmouth proved only

too well. These “rhines,” as they are called in the West Country, take the place of hedge-rows, and serve also to drain away into the sluggish moorland stream the water which in rainy seasons would collect on the low ground. Turf Moor is a strange looking country, with its interminable stacks of black peat, its great hollows from which turf has been taken, its miles of straight-cut dykes by which the water is drained away into the rivers. The sombre hue of the great plain is relieved by picturesque groups of turf-cutters, by dense masses of noble Scotch firs—trees that flourish well in the peaty soil—and by an occasional belt of coppice that runs in among the peat workings—a jungle of reeds and bulrushes, of bracken and tall royal fern, a sort of No-Man’s Land, a very paradise for beast and bird.

The moormen happen on strange things sometimes when they are digging in the peat. It is no very rare thing for the turf-cutter’s tool to clash on pottery or rude weapons far below the present level of the moor. Some years since a bow was thus discovered, whose once heavy yew wood was so altered by its long soaking that it was as light as cork. At one place an iron

anchor was found, at another the paddle of an old canoe.

There is a tradition in the marshes that, years ago, whenever after a dry summer the water was low in one of the great rhines, a boat became visible, embedded in the bank. "Squire Phippen's "Big Ship," as it was called, has long been lost sight of, but in more recent times another canoe has been found on the moor, which happily has met with the attention it deserves.

Some labourers who had been employed every autumn to clear out the rhines on Cranhill Moor, near Glastonbury, had often been inconvenienced at one point by what they thought was the trunk of an old tree—such as are frequently found buried in the peat. The place was pointed out to a local archæologist, Mr. Arthur Bulleid, of Glastonbury, and he saw at once that the supposed tree-trunk was an old British canoe, in splendid preservation, most skilfully worked out of a single log. The end which had projected from the bank is damaged by the spades with which the labourers had repeatedly in past years tried to cut it away, but the rest is uninjured. This curious old craft is flat-bottomed, and pointed at each end, just as are the boats that still navigate the rhines

of the district. It measures about seventeen feet in length, is perhaps thirty inches broad, and ten or eleven inches deep.

This canoe might have continued for years a mere obstacle to the clearing of the rhine—now a small ditch, but once a navigable water-way—were it not that the whole district was interested in the recent discovery of an ancient British village, of which it is safe to say that few things of more importance have rewarded recent archæological research in this country.

The ancient Lake Dwellings of Switzerland and Northern Italy, though our knowledge of them is not yet half-a-century old, are familiar wherever Archæology is studied. In the forty years which have elapsed since they were first examined, it has been found that there are many places, even now, where huts, constructed on the same plan, are still in use. Such dwellings exist in the shallows along the Amazon and the Orinoco. Travellers have described them, as they are at this moment, in Borneo and New Guinea. Cameron found them in the heart of the Dark Continent. To this very day Roumelian fishermen inhabit huts built on piles over the water, in the same spot where, twenty-five centuries ago, the children

of the Paeonian Lake Dwellers were, according to Herodotus, tied by the leg to prevent them falling into the water.

But, long before the discovery of the Swiss Lake Villages in 1853, another somewhat similar form of primitive habitation was known, confined, as far as can be at present ascertained, to countries inhabited by Celtic races. This was the Crannog, or Marsh Village, from the Celtic word *crann*, a tree—not built on piles in the water, but on platforms of timber laid over brushwood arranged on the soft soil of a morass. The existence of such dwellings had long been known, but little attention was paid to them before the famous researches of Keller, in Switzerland. Modern Archæologists have, however, explored at least a hundred of these Villages in Ireland, and about half that number in Scotland; and many most interesting remains have been recovered from them.

The Scotch and Irish Crannogs appear to belong to the Iron Age. Implements of the more primitive materials have, it is true, been found in them, but they were not such as were in use in the Bronze or Stone Ages. They differ both in shape and in the style of their ornamentation. A

few stone celts have been found in Irish Crannogs, but no object belonging to a time earlier than the Age of Iron has yet been met with in the Marsh Villages of Scotland. The metal objects are, as a rule, characteristic of the period between the 9th and the 12th centuries, though we have evidence that some of the Irish Crannogs were in use long after that time. Allusions to them frequently occur in the old writers. We learn from "The Annals of the Four Masters" that the historic Crannog of Lough Gabhor—the first that was examined in Ireland—was burnt A.D. 848, and again, by the Danes, in 933. An account, written at the time, of the expedition sent by Queen Elizabeth to put down the rebel Earl of Tyrone, describes a Crannog in County Down, which "was seated in the midst of a great bog, and no way accessible but through thick woods, hardly passable. It had about it two deep ditches, both encompassed with strong pallisadoes, a very high and thick rampart of timber, and well flanked with bulwarks. For defence of the place, forty-two musqueteers and some twenty swordsmen were lodged in it." This was in 1602. Later still, Sir Felim O'Neill, who had headed the rebellion of 1641, was captured in a Crannog, in 1642.

Until recent years no Crannog had been found in this country. The discovery of a very extensive Settlement of this kind, in the turf moor near Glastonbury, is thus an event of great Archæological interest, which is much increased by the fact that, whereas the remains found in the Scotch and Irish Crannogs point to a period so recent as from the ninth to the seventeenth centuries, the Marsh Village discovered in Somersetshire has yielded, so far, no object which appears to be so late even as the Roman occupation.

But these broad flats on Turf Moor, their patches of coppice, the edges of the green “droves,” the waste lands where turf has been cut, and which have been left to recover themselves by the rest and growth of perhaps half a century, even the very ditches of the moor, are in summer-time a happy hunting-ground for the naturalist.

The plants of these monotonous marshes, the birds, the beasts, the insects, have a character of their own. In summer-time the meadows that stretch from rhine to rhine are crimson with orchis and clover, with sheep sorrel and ragged robin, are golden with flower-de-luce, whitened with tall oxeye daisies and soft tufts of cotton grass. Now the whole moorland is sobered to a

dull, monotonous hue of mingled browns and greys tinged with a sad-coloured note of green. The rhines that to-day are but straight-cut belts of water, with no beauty and hardly more of interest, were filled then to the very brim with sedges and iris and tall stems of flowering rush. Along their hedges grew teasels and skullcap and comfrey, and down their steep banks the moneywort poured its lavish streams of gold. Few plants of any sort are to-day visible in the water. But the still depths were covered then with a green film of weed, crossed and re-crossed with a very labyrinth of tracks, where rat or moorhen or water-rail had cut its devious way. Here grew the arrow-head, with its beautiful white flowers. Here floated the star-like blossoms of the frogbit. And here the bladderwort, that now rests unseen on the mud at the bottom, buoyed up by multitudinous little floats of air, lifted its exquisite spike above the surface.

The busy life that in the summer filled these interminable ditches has ebbed away. The green jungle of flags and water plants where the sedge warbler sang—not from dawn till nightfall only, but from sundown till the east was grey—is gone. The reeds among whose slender stems the warbler

wove her exquisite nest are beaten down. The peewits who reared their scanty broods among these open meadows are here still. Even the quails that hid their beautiful eggs among the summer clover may still be couching in the withered grass; and water-rails find shelter still among the brown and broken reeds.

The banks are honeycombed with the burrows of water-rats—as most people call them. Beautiful creatures, not really rats at all, and having little in common with their evil-minded, mischievous, objectionable namesakes. Their habit of burrowing is perhaps their one fault, and has more than once helped to break down the bank of a river here, and so deluge the moors with miles of tawny water. Water-rats are out at all times, all the year, except in the very coldest weather. But twilight is their favourite hour. Then as you steal quietly along by the bank you may watch the soft brown balls of fur crouched on the narrow fringe of shore; may envy their incomparable feats of diving; may follow their course by a slight ripple on the surface as they swim to some secret hiding place. The owls know their habits well. This very month a barn owl was seen in the twilight, flying over the moor on its soft and

soundless wings. Suddenly it swooped below the bank of a rhine, reappearing a moment later with a water-rat in its claws. Scared by a shout, it dropped its prey, but the rat, though warm, was stone dead.

Much less often seen are the water-shrews, whose frolics you may watch in broad daylight if you are so very fortunate as to come upon a party of them at play, swimming round and round like the tiny beetles that spin in mazy circles on the surface. The water itself is, in the summer-time, crowded with life. Over the surface skim rowing-flies and water-spiders. Under it a countless crowd of creatures live out their little day—beetles and water-scorpions, active little boatmen that paddle up and down with dexterous oars, caddis larvæ carrying about with them their houses built of grains of sand, or scraps of reed, or of a multitude of tiny shells. Shells there are everywhere, small some of them, but even the very smallest revealing under the microscope forms as marvellous as that of the nautilus itself. Slender newts, too, swarm in the still water, and great black tritons, the terror of the moorfolk, in whose eyes even the viper is hardly more venomous.

Not to every one is it given to appreciate the

beauty and the wonder of the inhabitants of this happy hunting-ground. In such a paradise two naturalists had been hard at work through a hot summer afternoon. They were stretched contentedly by the roadside, when a burly, red-faced farmer driving by drew rein, and seeing their nets upon the grass asked them what sport they had had, and if it was eels or flounders they had been catching. They proceeded to explain. "Oh, "bitles," said the farmer, somewhat contemptuously. "And what be they vur, then?" This was a more difficult point. It was not at all easy to make him see that there could be any use in hoarding up such "common ornery rubbish" as that. Butterflies, now, he could understand, or "bird eggs." He himself had collected "bird "eggs" when he was a boy. But "bitles"! "Well," said he at last, "good day. I must be "gwine"; and he drove slowly off. He had not got more than fifty yards along the road, however, when he pulled up again, and turning half round in his seat, called out, "Hi! but I can't think "what ee can want they bitles vur!"



TURF MOOR: THE FROZEN MARSHES.

IT is now some years since, through the giving way of the bank of one of the moorland rivers, a large part of the low-lying land in the heart of Somersetshire was under water all through the autumn. Many tenants of cottages on the moor were, as they would put it, "drownded out," and there were outlying villages that for a long while could only be reached by means of boats. During a recent autumn another wide area in the same county

was flooded. Frost set in while a vast tract of land was still inundated. Miles of flooded marshland were entirely frozen over, and many cottages, after standing in the water for months past, were surrounded by the ice. So sharp was the cold that, on the second day of the frost, the fortunate few who were able to avail themselves of the opportunity had a perfect skating-ground, which must have measured thousands of acres.

A heavy snowfall, however, has changed the face of things altogether. Some of the moor men, whose ordinary avocations have long been at a standstill, have cleared a pretty fair piece of ice. But the rest is covered with snow. Much of it has sunk and broken, owing to the draining away of the water from beneath it; so that, vast as is still the frozen area, comparatively little of it is good enough to satisfy a fastidious performer.

But it is a wonderful landscape that, on every side of the little house which skaters on this part of the marshes use as their headquarters, lies glistening in the sunshine. A few old alder trees and storm-beaten Scotch firs shelter the cottage a little from the wind. And its all too scanty stacks and its picturesque sheds and outbuildings, whose

roof of tiles are weathered to every imaginable shade of red and brown, help to give an air of warmth and comfort. A primitive place. A place such as might have given shelter to King Alfred before that desperate fight yonder on the hills of Ethandune. The master of the house is a neatherd too, as it happens, and his heifers are at this moment all huddled in the byres about the cottage, only too glad to make the acquaintance of a sympathetic stranger. There is no entrance at the front. The frozen ground has "lifted" and has jammed the door. You must make your way in through the hospitable-looking brick-floored kitchen at the back.

Before the frost began the water was over the garden, and even on the cottage floor. And now, though the house is clear, the ice stretches away almost from the threshold, as far as the eye can see over the level country. It would be hard to picture a scene more absolutely desolate. On the skyline to the southward, just seen through the wintry haze, is a long line of low bluehills, with patches of snow on them dimly showing. Over a dark belt of fir trees to the eastward rises the Tor of Glastonbury, snow covered, too, for once. And right to the bases of the hills, over

Turf Moor: The Frozen Marshes. 191

field after field, stretches for miles the great white plain, broken only by lines of pollard willows, by tall aspens and clumps of alder; with patches of furze that look strangely out of place rising up through the ice, with here and there a gate, half-hidden, with haystacks standing forlorn upon the wintry level, and, sadder still, with cottages that, long since rendered uninhabitable by the water, are now completely surrounded by the ice.

In that cottage, some hundred yards farther on, whose walls have settled so much in the soft peat that there is not a straight line in all its primitive architecture, the water is still nine inches deep in all the rooms. The tenant of it is that moor man standing yonder, lending a helping hand to the skaters preparing for the ice. A picturesque figure, whose old brown coat, with its endless varieties of shade would delight the soul of an artist. You can understand why he wears boots up to his knees when you learn that every day, from the beginning of December until a fortnight since, he waded to his door through more than a foot of water. He is better off since the frost, for now he can slide in.

A characteristic touch about these cottages is the store of winter fuel, the stacks of peat heaped

against the wall. Almost more characteristic still is the quaintly-shaped boat, flat-bottomed, sharp at both ends, that you see in so many gardens; for not only are floods here far too common, but the innumerable ditches make convenient waterways for bringing home grass or peat.

A strange silence broods over the landscape. No birds are visible save the few that hang about the outbuildings. The flocks of gulls and the few ducks that were here before the floods were frozen have all disappeared. Multitudes of skylarks, too, passed over when the snow set in, but they soon vanished. This was once a great country for wild-duck. Twenty years ago there were four decoys almost in sight from this cottage. Now they are all drained—"let off" as the moor folk put it. The only sound besides the low lament of the wind among the alders, the plaintive protests of the heifers in the byres, and the laughter and voices and occasional clink of steel where the skaters are preparing for work, is a strange, hollow, booming sound under the ice, or the sharper crash when it gives way because the water has gone from under it. It is strange to see great sheets of ice caught in the bushes or

Turf Moor: The Frozen Marshes. 193

among the alder stems, feet above the general level.

It is a wintry wind that sweeps over the frozen marshes. But here, in this sunny corner, with a heap of dry peats to sit on, in the shelter of a stable on whose door is nailed a lucky horseshoe, there is the warmth of very summer.

But hark, the ring of skates upon the ice! And see, the skaters are leaving their little camping ground just outside the garden. Already there are moving figures far out on the frozen meadows. As you watch them start, some bold and fearless, as to the manner born, some doubtful and hesitating, and hardly venturing to lift their feet, you might almost read something of their story in their very movements.

That tall figure yonder, so absolutely at home upon his skates, had more time in one long Canadian winter to learn the art he practises so well than most of us get in a lifetime. And to one who, in a forced march across the Dominion in the dead of winter, has tried in vain to sleep on the snow with the thermometer forty degrees below zero, and who has put down his boiling can of grog to take it up next minute frozen solid, cold like this is

nothing. And you might have known that the stalwart skater further out, whose wife is the most graceful among many graceful figures in the moving throng, gained his first experiences on skates in latitudes where the frost sometimes holds unbroken for twelve long dreary weeks.

The frozen-out moor men are ready enough to volunteer assistance. And as the day wears on it is really marvellous to see with what dexterity they carry cups of tea to the skaters; while their dogs, with an eye to biscuits, make friends with each little group in turn. A kindly race, these Somerset folks, sunny of face, and pleasant of speech, in spite of the hard times, and the enforced idleness and the bitter weather. But they hold strong views as to the incapacity of engineers who fail to guard against such floods as this. "What be the use," said one, "of they Drainage Commissioners, what charges we two and "eightpence poundage for keeping the water "off of we? This here flood have lasted since "before Christmas. Here be the rent going on "all the time, and the land won't be no use "till May."

Pleasant it is to watch from this sheltered corner the evolutions of the skaters. The wind

Turf Moor: The Frozen Marshes. 195

that blows so keen over the miles of frozen marshland, and that lends a heightened colour to their glowing faces, cannot reach you here. Pleasant, too, is the scent of the hay and the breath of cattle from the byres. But pleasanter still is the ingle nook within the cottage, in a tiny room, so low that the beam across its ceiling is a trap for even the shortest of the group on the old settle, by the fragrant fire of peat. By such a fire it was that Alfred sat. Yet there is a long gap between the half-shaped bow of the old story and the gun, ancient as it is, hanging yonder on the wall; and if there are cakes about this hearth, you will not hear the tall, blue-eyed, winsome damsel who dispenses them

“ . . . scold with kindling eye,
In good broad Somerset,”

as the neatherd's wife, a thousand years since, scolded the Royal fugitive in these very marshes.



WINSCOMBE: A CAMP OF REFUGE

ON the edge of a broad valley in the Mendips, on the gentle slope of a line of low green hills, there stands a quiet hamlet, almost hidden now among its clustering trees. At the foot of the slope, standing some way back from the village street, is a white-walled cottage, whose lawns and garden grounds only a slender fence divides from the fields that fringe the village.

Winscombe: A Camp of Refuge. 197

On one side of the garden runs a narrow lane, losing itself presently in the meadows, a quieter backwater of the quiet village life, in whose old walls and deep-browed hedgerows many birds find lodging. On the other side, beyond a row of picturesque old sheds and ruinous old buildings, with brown roofs of thatch and crowns of thick-growing ivy, stretch the bird-haunted aisles of an orchard. The nut-hatches love its cavernous trees. Its shades are musical, long before the dawn, with the songs of thrush and blackbird, of redstart and willow-wren. Among the old buildings tits and wagtails and robins hide their nests in crannies of the crumbling masonry.

But to the garden itself, islanded by lanes and meadows, with its trees and shrubs, its broad thickets of laurel and rhododendron and arbutus, the birds come as to a Camp of Refuge. In the tall evergreen above the gate, wreathed in a great bower of ivy, blackbirds even now are feeding their young. There are nests in the lilacs, in the laurels, in the hedges, in the trellis on the wall.

Through the open windows the warm air brings all pleasant scents and sounds. The low of cattle,

on distant farms, the mellow chiming of the old church bells, the rich strains of thrush and black-bird, the sweet song of the swallow, clink of oxeye, call of cuckoo, jay's harsh cry, and wood-pecker's light-hearted laughter, mingle with the perfume of the roses and the woodruff. The swallows that sing on the brown gable of the barn beyond the precincts may have their nests plundered by prowling schoolboys. The hollow trees in the orchard, the chinks in the old wall of the lane, are not wholly safe from the village birds'-nester. But here is sanctuary inviolate, from which no bird was ever driven.

Year after year the fly-catchers repair their nest in the plum tree trained against the wall. No hand disturbs the martins that build under the broad eaves. No sweet singer ever here paid with his life the penalty of his taste for cherries.

Here no blackbird ever suffered for his raids upon the strawberry beds. This garden is to him the garden of the laureate :

“The espaliers and the standards tall
Are thine ; the range of lawn and park ;
The un-netted black-hearts ripen dark,
All thine, against the garden wall.”

Winscombe: A Camp of Refuge. 199

Here the bullfinch may pillage at his will. The only unpardonable crime that even the house-sparrow can commit is to take wrongful possession of a martin's nest. Even then the culprit has never suffered anything but reproaches. Even when, with its own untidy heap of hay and feathers, it has blocked up a rain-water pipe, the disaster that it caused was not held warrant for eviction. And never surely were there sparrows quite so bright of plumage—so glossy their sleek heads, so rich their chestnut feathers, so stainless the white bars across their wings.

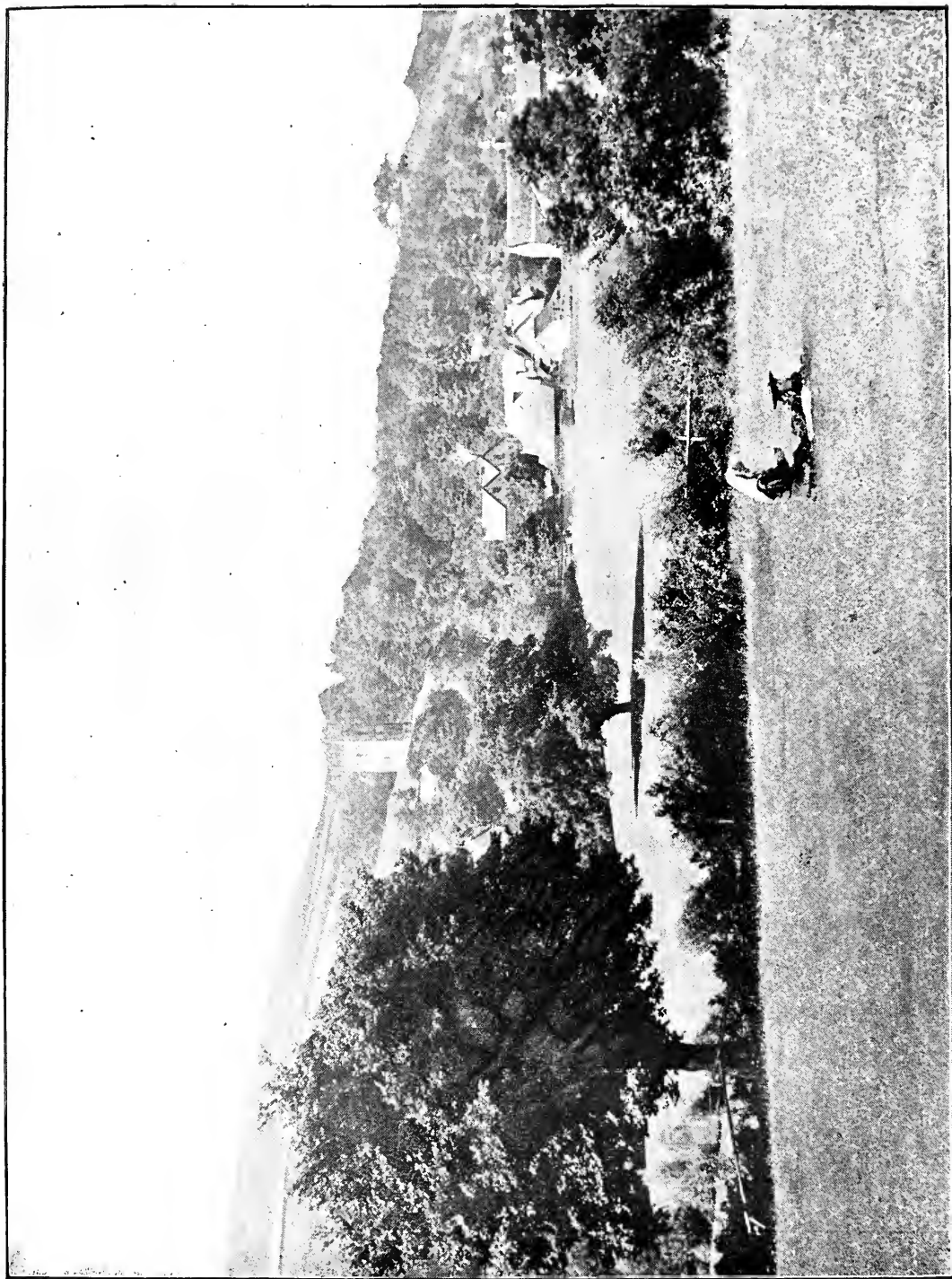
Here, too, in the hard winter weather, the birds have learnt by long experience to come as for corn in Egypt. The missel-thrush and the nut-hatch, the marsh-tit and the oxeye, know well the brilliant berries they may plunder at their will from the tall Irish yew before the window. In the very bearing of the birds that haunt the garden, of the robin and the sparrow and the song-thrush, that in hard times come to the very window to be fed, with firm faith in their gentle almoners, you may read the confidence born of long experience, the result of years of welcome and protection.

The fly-catcher brooding on her nest, her

glossy head just showing over the rim of the little cradle she has slung between the plum-tree and the wall, watches your approach without the least alarm. And as you stroll between the borders, bright with thickets of peonies, covered with great rose-like blooms, with their flags and pansies and pale yellow poppies, and with all their hundred flowers, she will flicker lightly by to her favourite resting-place on the rose-hung arch over the garden path, or to the handle of the walking-stick set upright in the grass for her sovereign pleasure, or to the leafless laurel bough that, while shears and pruning-knife are merciless to every other dead wood in the garden, is spared for her sake alone.

Watch her for a moment. See how she turns her head this way and that, keeping a sharp lookout for passing fly or beetle. See how suddenly she darts from her watch tower, how she hovers for a moment in the air, with faint click of her sharp bill, flying lightly back, perhaps beating her prey against the bough a time or two before she swallows it. There is a saying here that fortune hangs on giving shelter to the flycatcher :

“If you scare the flycatcher away,
No good luck will with you stay.”



A MENDIP VILLAGE: WINSCOMBE.

Winscombe: A Camp of Refuge. 201

But there is no thought of fortune, good or ill, mingled with the kindly care that has made for so many years a sanctuary of this quiet spot. The very cat seems to have learnt that — under the eyes of the family at least—there is close time here, all the year round, for every bird that flies.

When Jock is lying at the door, stretched out at length in the sunshine, you may see a thrush alight within a yard of him, the picture of righteous indignation, feathers ruffled, wings adroop, and storm and scold and flutter and gesticulate; while he, his conscience pricked perhaps—who knows? —by the remembrance of an early breakfast some fine morning among the lilac bushes, when that brood of young thrushes disappeared so strangely, blinks with affected sleepiness at his fierce little accuser. She has even been seen to perch upon his back, when he, as if remembering some previous engagement, stretched himself, and yawned, and meekly walked away.

At the far end of the lawn, in a nook between the meeting lines of hedge-row, stand four sheltering elms, joining their heads in a green canopy, cool and restful. From the seat beneath them you look out over a broad meadow to the

misty hills. The long grass is bright with myriad flowers, with lotus and hawkweed, and with yellow crowns of dandelion, whose silvery parachutes now and then sail over, sinking slowly down the summer air. Somewhere in the grass, that in a few short weeks will fill the house with the sweet incense of the hay, a corncrake is calling. It is a strange note, harsh and unmusical always; heard at night, sometimes irritating beyond words to paint; yet here, and now, a pleasant country sound.

You may watch the shrike yonder, perched motionless on his favourite hawthorn, in whose shadow his mate is doubtless already brooding on her eggs. You may listen to the goldfinch singing in the green mist of meeting branches overhead; see the grey cuckoo alight on the topmost crest of the great elm that towers above the meadow; watch the busy starlings as they pass and repass with hurried flight. And, as through the great masses of lilac, now beginning to abate their rare perfume, you catch glimpses of hills and meadows, of the white houses of the village, with its orchards and its elms, and, crowning these, the grey tower of the church, looking down like a watchful sentinel on

Winscombe: A Camp of Refuge. 203

the hamlet lying at its feet, you feel it was to no fairer spot than this that the poet called his friend, when he sang :

“Or if thou tarry, come with the summer

That welcome comer

Welcome as he.

When noontide sunshine beats on the meadow

A seat in shadow,

We'll keep for thee.’



WINSCOMBE: A MIDSUMMER MEADOW.

THE whirr of the iron mower has ceased at length. Hour after hour the clashing blades swept in still narrowing circles round and round the spacious meadow. Now the last swath has fallen. Now in the centre of the field the machine stands silent; the tired horses taking toll of the sweet grass that is strewn about their feet.

The men lie motionless, their sunburned faces

buried in the fragrant coolness. A few short hours ago this broad field was a sea of nodding grasses, whose tasselled points lent soft and changing tints of purple to the long waves that betrayed the light movements of the air. Sheets of great moon-daisies whitened it. Here it was golden with dyer's weed and lingering buttercups; and there it was crimson with fiery touches of red sorrel. Under the hot noonday sun each waft of air that stirred across it was fragrant with mingled perfumes, of the scent of hawkweed and lotus and sweet clover blooms. Its cool depths were stirred by honey-hunting bees. Wandering butterflies floated over it. Burnet moths in black and crimson sailed across it on their silken wings. Now the close shaven sward is strewn with drying grass and fading flowers. Bee nor butterfly will visit it more. To-morrow night not a touch of colour will remain of all its mingled beauty, ruined now past all hope; not a petal of its oxeye daisies, not a hawkweed unwithered, not a lingering clover bloom.

The hour is late. Along the low hills that bound the valley hangs the haze of sunset. There is a faint flush of rose colour on the soft clouds

that drift slowly overhead. The air is still filled with fragrance. Instead of the sweet incense of the clover, there is the scent of new-mown hay.

For the breath of the lost flowers of the meadow there are all the perfumes of the one garden that gives upon the field—of roses all in bloom on arch and trellis, of clumps of tall sweet peas, white and red and rich imperial purple, of the delicate wild pinks, rooted at will in the old garden wall. And, although the last blossom has faded from the hawthorns round the meadow, slowly, and as with reluctance, delicate dog-roses are scattered broadcast all along the hedge-rows, and the woodbine sprays are rich already with pale sweet clusters.

This is a flowery haytime. Surely there was never more lavish wealth of roses on the hedges, nor can one even fancy broader sheets of oxeye daisies in the mowing grass.

Along the hedges the machine has left a fringe of tall grasses still unmown. And this green jungle, and the broad thickets behind it, are all astir with birds, some of them gaining now their first experiences of the great green world—a world of warmth and beauty, such as rarely, even

in the noon of summer, greets the young children of the air. Linnets and finches, thrushes and blackbirds, and a host of other wingèd toilers of the field, are busy among the fallen swaths—not plundering the seeds, but seeking treasure-trove of slugs and wire-worms, and all the myriad creatures whose haunts the fall of the grass forest has laid bare.

Here forages a troop of starlings; the old birds in dark and glossy plumage, the young brood in sober, unpretending brown. Now a little cloud of martins wheel over the meadow, fluttering down to hover above the grass with soft, sweet notes. Now a singing swallow floats along. And now on dark wings a troop of swifts sail swarming down the field—labourers in man's service one and all.

On the end of a dead ivy branch that stands out of the garden hedge sits a solitary flycatcher; a small grey figure that, in her shape and attitude, is like no other bird that haunts the precincts. She is silent for the most part, only uttering now and then a weak, half querulous note, that is answered by notes weaker and more querulous from the heart of the thick laurel near. Again and again she takes short flights into the air,

across the garden, and even a dozen yards or more out over the grass, fluttering in the air a moment, and then lightly flitting back to her perch on the dead ivy stem, or to the rail that parts the garden from the meadow.

In a plum tree on the cottage wall, half hidden among clustering roses, is the empty nest from which the grey youngsters hiding now among the bushes have but just spread wings to fly. For once they tried their powers too soon. They ventured over the edge of their small nursery on wings not yet strong enough for flight, and they were found one morning on the ground among the stocks and poppies and sweet-williams underneath the nest, while the anxious parents, with plaintive cries, fluttered over them with vain attempts at rescue.

The fall had been fatal to one of the little aeronauts, but three were rescued, and, in a small basket filled with hay, were slung close up under the deserted nest. They made no effort to get back to their old quarters, but sat content on the edge of the basket, three little odd owl-like figures; while the old birds, their minds at rest again, foraged for them all day, from dawn till dark, chasing moths and flies along the

garden paths, in vain attempts to satisfy their insatiable needs.

Under the eaves above the flycatcher's tree there is a martin's nest. At least, martins built it, but there was a dispute this year about the tenancy. It is not a new nest. It is in fact a tenement of many years' standing. And while two rival couples of martins were still discussing the question of proprietorship, a pair of prowling house sparrows stepped in and took possession. Perhaps they were the arbitrators—who knows?

And now these house sparrows, bent on fitting a warmer lining to their stolen habitation, cast covetous glances on the young flycatchers' basket, and when the parent birds were away—sometimes even under their very eyes—the unscrupulous brigands carried off the hay by handful.

Fine fellows, these country sparrows: so very different from their grimy, scurrilous, soot-stained cousins of the city streets, with even a note of music on their ready tongues, and with plumage of such pure white and velvety black, of such rich warm tones of chestnut, that you would say they were among the handsomest of birds, might perhaps even go the length

of wondering what strange species they might be.

And now the men, rising reluctantly from their lair among the grass, unship the long blades of the machine. It goes slowly jingling up the field, and through the gate at the far end, ready for more mowing on the morrow.

The sun low down in the west, showing for a brief space through the trees his face of fiery gold barred with the dark branches, throws far across the grass the shadows of a group of tall elms out in the meadow, whose green heads tower a hundred feet into the clear, pale blue. Motionless they stand, or seem to stand. The light wafts of scented air may flutter the leaves upon their lofty crests, but have no power to sway their giant branches. From far up among their green crown of foliage floats a goldfinch's song—a pleasant sound, a note of summer and green fields and open country. Pleasant, too, is the slow clink of a whetted scythe, sounding faintly from a distant meadow, where some tired haymaker, perhaps for the last time in the long summer day, is putting a better edge upon his worn old blade.

Along the hedge yonder a man is finishing

off the ragged edges the machine has left, and the swish, swish of the grass that falls before his sweeping strokes has almost as sweet a sound to-night as the vesper of the song-thrush over there, high up among the branches of a hedge-row elm.

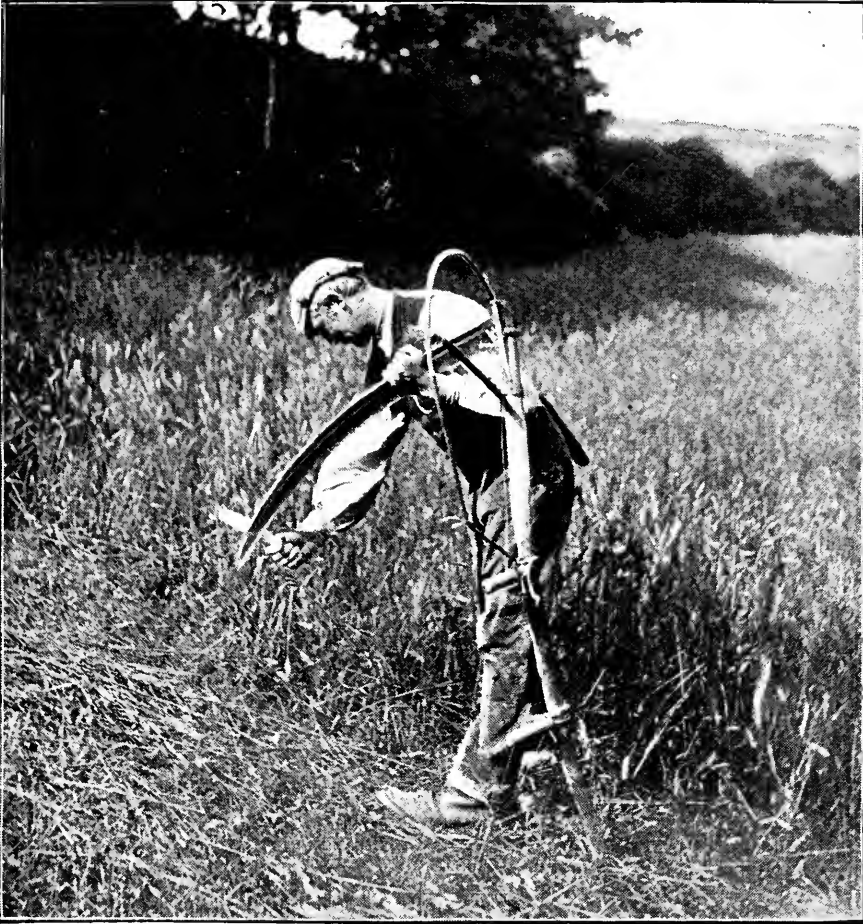
The gentle nurse of the foundling flycatchers is moving slowly across the meadow, the light of sunset on her white dress, sweet face, and graceful figure. She is carrying a great handful of oxeye daisies, gleaned from the new-mown hay—adding now a tall spray of quaking grass, now a leaf of bright red sorrel, and looking now and then with wistful eyes at the flowers for whose brief life she thus provides a little longer span. The sun is down. The long day's work is ended. In the combe yonder, the little sleepy hollow that dies away among the quiet hills, the purple shadows deepen, and the last faint lingering glow fades slowly from the cliffs along its southern verge.

No clink of scythe-blade now, no sound of toil. The last note of labour and of daylight is the shouting from some distant farm, where the last load is being cheered into the stack-yard. A restless corncrake cries among the long grass

of the next meadow that stands waiting for the scythe. Far off among the elms beyond the church an owl hoots. It is the hour of rest; the hour when, over the blue vault above,

“ . . . The brooding twilight
Unfolds her starry wings,
And warm hearts bless with tenderness
The peace that evetide brings : ”

—the peace of God, for this broad hollow in the hills. Slowly on the quiet landscape falls the restful stillness of the summer night.



WINSCOMBE: HARVEST HOME.

IT is strange to sit, this bright September morning, under the shadow of a noble row of limes, and listen to the whirr of the iron mower as it rattles round and round the wide meadow yonder. It is late for haymaking. Among the branches overhead are the red and gold of

autumn, and the grass at the feet of the old trees is strewn with withered leaves. These fly-catchers that flit across the lawn and sail back to their stations along the fence will soon be leaving us. It cannot be long before the chiff-chaffs, now calling so blithely in the limes, are silent. The clear, sweet singing of the robins is far more in keeping with the spirit of autumn, than the sound of the machine. But the rain and the sun between them have brought a noble aftermath to gladden the hearts of the farmers, whose case will, after all, not be quite so evil as they feared.

It is a strange experience to hear, in the pauses of the iron reaper, the mellow sound of bells that are ringing for the Harvest Home. Strange to cheer the last load into the stack-yard, and to assemble for a Harvest Festival, while fresh-cut hay is still lying in the fields. Towards the grand old tower on the hill-slope yonder, that for so many ages has kept watch and ward over the parish, the village folk, in all their holiday attire, are trooping across this pleasantest of Mendip valleys. As we make our way with them along the green country lanes, we can see how the hedge-rows are beginning already to wear the hues of autumn. The Old Man's Beard is all

grey with its feathery seeds. Dogwood and Guelder Rose are bright with wayside fruit. The banks are gay with St. John's wort and Golden Rod and tall Canterbury Bells.

Pausing a minute under the old churchyard yew, that for unknown centuries has spread its dark arms over the dust of the forefathers of the hamlet, the little knots of villagers file into the church. The porch is hung with oat sheaves and red apples; and over the door are hung boughs of wild hedge-row plums, bullace, not sloes, so thickly clustered and with so rare a bloom that they might pass easily for grapes.

There are but few farmers in the congregation. The hay is "down" in the meadows; that is one reason. Some farmers, too, have no mind for thanksgiving—forgetful that half a loaf is, at any rate, better than no bread at all. But some at least of the villagers have agreed to carry out the injunction expressed in the wheaten letters that lie on a green fringe of ferns all along under the south wall—"Honour the Lord with thy first "fruits"—for the windows are heaped with fruit and vegetables, with apples and 'taters, and huge marrows—the best of each man's field or garden. The pulpit is draped with heather and brown

bracken, hung with grapes and apples, and long trails of bryony; while the font, with which generations of parishioners have made early and perhaps not altogether agreeable acquaintance, is lost in a great pile of ferns and flowers. The chancel is a very bower of green. Lectern and reading-desk are wreathed with creepers and corn sheaves and trophies of the harvest.

The hour of service is drawing near. The chimes, that just now were swinging softly overhead, break off into the homing-bell. The rest of the congregation troop slowly in. Young village beauties, conscious of admiring glances, are scattered here and there—bright reliefs of light and colour among the darker costumes of the men. The choir-boys, conscious too, but more sheepish as they run the gauntlet of less sympathetic eyes, muster under the tower, where presently the tall curate joins them, and the curtain is drawn across like a sort of gigantic conjuring-box. Young folks they are, for the most part, that fill up the benches. Yet there is a good sprinkling of the older generation. That is a fine sample of a West Country farmer yonder, that burly red-faced figure, glancing idly at the tablets on the wall in “memory” of long-forgotten

yeomen, "late of this parish," or the stony figures weeping silently into colossal urns—that doubtless are as great a wonder to him now as when he was a boy.

The bell stops. The whispers cease. A solemn hush falls on the gathered worshippers. And now the Vicar, from his station under the tower, calls on his flock to join in the thanksgiving hymn—

"Come, ye thankful people, come ;
Raise the song of Harvest Home."

Two and two the choir-boys pass, singing, up the aisle, their clear tones mingling with the deeper voices of their elders. The old men, no longer strong enough to swing a scythe or turn a furrow, sit silent. The lines on their reverent faces seem like records of hard times and bitter weather. Their working days are done. In the words the choir are singing, they are waiting to

". . . . be gathered in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin :
All upon the Golden Floor,
Praising Thee for evermore "

The sweet notes of the anthem, "I will lift up
"mine eyes to the hills," roll among the dark

rafters overhead. The preacher exhorts us to thankfulness, even for what we may look on as adversity. Should we be so ungracious, he asks, as to return no thanks at all because a gift turned out to be smaller than we expected? Farmers as a rule certainly have, rightly or wrongly, a reputation for, let us say, not always being so thankful as they might be. It was a yeoman of this very parish who, when congratulated once upon the extraordinary crops, all good alike, replied—"That's where 'tis; 'tis all so good we "shan't have nothing to give to the *poor* stock!" A good discourse, straightforward and hard-hitting, true and telling.

We file out under the ancient doorway, and pass in procession under the flags and streamers and mottoes that the villagers have hung at intervals across the green lanes, to the place where, in less serious fashion, the people of the hamlet, of all sorts and conditions, are to meet on equal terms—Vicar and Lady Bountiful and dames of high degree on the one side, and farmers and labourers on the other—for a frolic in the spacious meadow. It is an ideal day for it; the air is warm, the grass is dry. Tea in the tent is the first business; a tent brave with

festoons and flags and decorations. There is a hint in one of the mottoes at the shortcomings of the season—

“May the year '93
Be the worst we shall see.”

Follows then a game of rounders, in which the Vicar, after much persuasion, agrees to play, if another somewhat elderly pillar of the Church will take a hand too. It were long to tell the varying fortunes of the game; how the portly figure of the wheelwright was hampered by the unwonted dignity—as to workadays, that is—of a long frock coat; how the village butcher, glorious in a white waistcoat, forgets it in the heat of battle; how a tall young lady in grey makes the most brilliant of catches; and how the pillar of the Church was thrown out by the long curate. And if the Vicar plays no very conspicuous part in the game, his boys are the life of it; and it is his daughter too, who, in a far corner of the field, leads a dance of village children, to the old-world ditty, “As we go
“gathering nuts in May, nuts in May, nuts in
“May,” their sweet young voices sounding clear above the shouts of the players.

But the game is ended. The next move is to

the tent, hung now with clusters of lamps, and with everything cleared ready for a dance. The band on a dais in the centre, an uncommonly good band too, strikes up a lively air. There is a little shyness at first starting—not more than fifty couples, perhaps, to begin with; a little awkwardness, and a few collisions; but the company is pervaded with such imperturbable good humour that no one cares for any mishap. As the evening wears on the gaps on the seats against the canvas walls grow wider. And when the first square dance is about to begin there is a good deal of active searching for partners. “Have you got ‘a ‘vizzyvize’?” says a young farmer to a village belle. The Vicar pleads that his dancing days are over; but it is clear that no one takes more delight than he in the innocent merry-making of his flock. A hundred pairs of dancers are footing merrily on the short, dry turf. “Warm, ‘b’aint it?” says one sturdy young farmer to another, who stands mopping his brow at the end of the set.

But as the summer night wears on, and the revellers settle to their work in earnest, it is a warmer business still. Hats are tilted further and further back; waistcoats are loosened; and at

length, in the closing reel, hats are tossed aside and coats even are discarded. It is an orderly company, quiet and well-behaved to the very last, breaking off their revels on the stroke of midnight, trooping out of the tent that, with its multitudinous lamps, is bright against the moonless sky, its festoons of flags and creepers showing clearly through the canvas walls. They go their several ways across the wide parish, along the dim, unlighted lanes, to meet no more, under such conditions at any rate, until next year brings round another Harvest Home.



WINTERHEAD: AFTERMATH.

THERE are many symbols on the dial of Nature to mark the changing of the year. Such signs are the brightening colours of the meadows, and the growing hosts of insect life. Such a sign is the strange, noonday silence of the woodland; and such, too, is the change in the cuckoo's cry—faltering, even before the longest day. Such signs are the gathering of the swallows, the purple mist on the plumed reeds by the river, the blackberry clusters ripening fast along the hedge-row, the butterflies that flutter in through the open windows, seeking already some dark nook in which to hide themselves in good time before the setting in of winter.

But plainer even than these, for most of us at any rate, is the altered tone of the hedge-rows—ever ready to answer to the influence of the sunshine. It is under the hedge-row that spring leaves her fairest traces—violets white and blue, and primroses, with their soft, delicate perfume. May crowns the thickets with the foamy fragrance of the hawthorn. June studs the long briar sprays with sweet wild roses, fairest of all flowers of summer. And now, again, these hot summer days are lending new beauty to the country lanes; not of flowers or of fresh young foliage, but of mellow leaves and gleaming berries.

There is a special charm about these old West Country lanes, worn, sometimes, by the clumsy wheels and toiling feet of many centuries, deep down below the fields on either hand; lanes that lead perhaps to nowhere, or that lose themselves in the meadows; lanes that in our fathers' time were, it may be, King's highways, and that now, grass-grown and neglected, with deep ruts and broadening hollows, where water lies in winter, are known only to the birds'-nester, or to village children in quest of nuts or blackberries. For most of us these quests are but memories of

childhood. Most of us can but echo the lament of the poet :

“ And blackberries, so mawkish now,
Were finely flavoured then ;
And nuts, such reddening clusters ripe,
I ne’er shall pull again.”

And yet, perhaps, though the feast of to-day is for the eye rather than the palate, we welcome as keenly as we ever did, nutting time, or days of blackberry harvest. We think less of the rich, ripe clusters, no doubt, but we are more alive to the beauty of the leaves, of the red stems that show so well among the green shadows, of the withering foliage, torn and ragged, yet touched in the autumn with gold and russet and fiery crimson.

The old yew yonder, by the church on the hill-side, under whose broad shadow so many centuries of village folk have gathered week by week, when service was over, to talk of the haying, and the weather, and even, it may be, of the business of their neighbours, stands out a dark, funereal mass against the grey masonry behind it. A nearer view would show that its heavy green is relieved by a thousand points of gold, not yet wholly tarnished, but at this distance they are lost in the

surrounding gloom. The copper beeches by the manor house, that of late gleamed like metal in the brilliant sunshine, are darkening into black. The larch plantations, marshalled in well-ordered phalanx along the old road half up the hill, have long since lost their freshness, and the leaves of this great pollard oak, whose maimed boughs throw a shadow none too wide, are bright no longer.

For centuries has the old tree cooled its knotted roots in the black earth of this swampy hollow. Signs of age are only too plain to read. The furrowed bark has been split away in patches, revealing underneath the galleries of wood-boring creatures; and the old trunk is scarred with pits that the wood-peckers have been digging, searching for fat white beetle grubs, or for the evil-smelling caterpillar of the goat-moth. And just below the pollarded branches there is a wood-pecker's hole, whose well-worn threshold suggests years of occupation.

Round the broad base of the tree marsh plants are growing—spearwort and water-plantain, broad blades of iris, and cool green plumes of maretail. In the long grass of the field that stretches far on either hand, there are crimson

spikes of orchis, pale marsh valerian, and bright ragged robin, and here and there nods a white plume of early cotton grass. It is a mere thread of water that, loitering slowly through the meadow, seems to pause round the roots of this old tree; the very slenderest of streams. Even the reedy hollow where it steals along, a broken line of silver, lost at times among sedges and brooklime and strong meadow grasses, is hardly noticed as it wanders idly through the field. Yet the birds know it well. Here the snipe lie in the hard weather. Here, too, in winter, you may watch the water-rail stealing in and out among the leafless thickets, through the jungle of dead stems of fig-wort, and hemlock, and tall hemp agrimony. On the black mud of the shore you may trace to-day the light footprints of the wag-tails that have their lodging in a cranny of the ruined mill in the next meadow, the broad sign manual of the moorhens whose nest is nearer still, and the tracks of many a water-loving bird beside.

And, though the listening ear can but just catch the faint tinkle of the tiny ripples that fret among the hemlock stems, there is as much life along this little streamlet as by the mill pool yonder,

though the rumble of the old wheel and the splash of the mill-race seem louder, even at this distance, than the low murmur of these tiny waves. There, among the rafters of the boat-house, the swallows build, and white-breasted martins have their nests under the broad eaves of the mill. But it is here, by this oozy margin, that they find the clay to frame their dwellings.

The moorhen rides in company with the little fleet of ducks upon the pool, though she draws hastily away when the miller lounges through the door to open the sluice, her nodding head keeping time to the quick beating of her paddles. But it is here that she hides her nest. It is behind the stems of that hazel bush, close down by the stream. Last night, when the old bird went off with a splash like a water-rat, there was just light enough to count the seven eggs. But now, when you steal quietly up, there is no old bird on guard. No eggs are in the nest. It is filled to the very brim with something dark, like a black shadow. All at once, as you stand peering down at it from the farther shore, hardly a yard away, the shadow breaks into fragments that struggle over the edge and plunge down into the water—seven fluffy little balls of sable down, each with a touch

of scarlet for a beak ; seven bold young moorhens, making their first venture into the great world ; argonauts born, paddling along the diminutive reaches of their tiny river, and scrambling away into the green jungle on the shore with a skill and readiness that is the heir-loom of untold generations.

The sedge-warbler, too, loves the reedy fringe of the mill pond, and he never shows to more advantage than when he balances on one of those tall spears of bulrush. But his nest is here, in yonder bush, whose foliage the cows have cropped so close. A strange song is his, copied now from the skylark, and now from the swallow ; and now again you might think that a party of house-sparrows were having a real good gossip down by the water.

Sparrow-like, too, is the note of a bird that sits motionless on the topmost twig of a maple tree that leans over the brook. His shape and his smart plumage, the flatness of his head and the rich red brown of his back, mark him for a shrike, a butcher-bird. He, too, is fond of this quiet corner. Year after year his mate and he come back to the hawthorn bush below the maple, to repair the great nest in which so many families

have been reared. On a broad flat stone that serves for a bridge over the meadow ditch near by are strewn some broken snail shells and a half-eaten cockchafer. But that was not his doing. If you look closely at the bush below his perch, the bush that shelters his well-hidden nest, you may discover the butcher-bird's "larder;" may see spitted on the long thorns that help to guard his dwelling, beetles, or bees, or even a young bird, or, it may be, a dragon-fly, who surely must have been taken unaware, since with those strong gauzy wings it is said he can distance even the swallow in his swift career.

A man with a pail slung on his shoulder, and with a milking stool in his hand, comes slowly out from the farm buildings, a dog following at his heels; a dog grey and shabby and unkempt, of breed altogether past description. But he is a master of his art, mongrel though he be. The man points to a group of cattle in the far corner of the field. At once the dog goes off to bring them in, heading and turning, and then urging them gently homeward, with marvellous skill and patience, encouraged now and again by his master's strange and inarticulate shouts. A troop of goslings is grazing in the middle of the field, goose and

gander standing sentinel at either end of the extended line. The old birds sound a challenge as the dog goes by, and lower their silly heads, and hiss and charge at him; while he, his mind set wholly on the business of the moment, canters past unmoved. An angry gander is by no means an antagonist to be despised. There is something particularly irritating, too, in the style of the attack. We can hardly wonder at the village urchin who, having been sorely harassed as to his unprotected legs by vicious digs of the old bird's beak, tried to soothe his wounded feelings by stoning at long range the unoffending goslings, blubbering out in mingled pain and rage to the indignant farmer who presently seized on him red-handed: "What for they goschicks' fayther bite "I, then?"

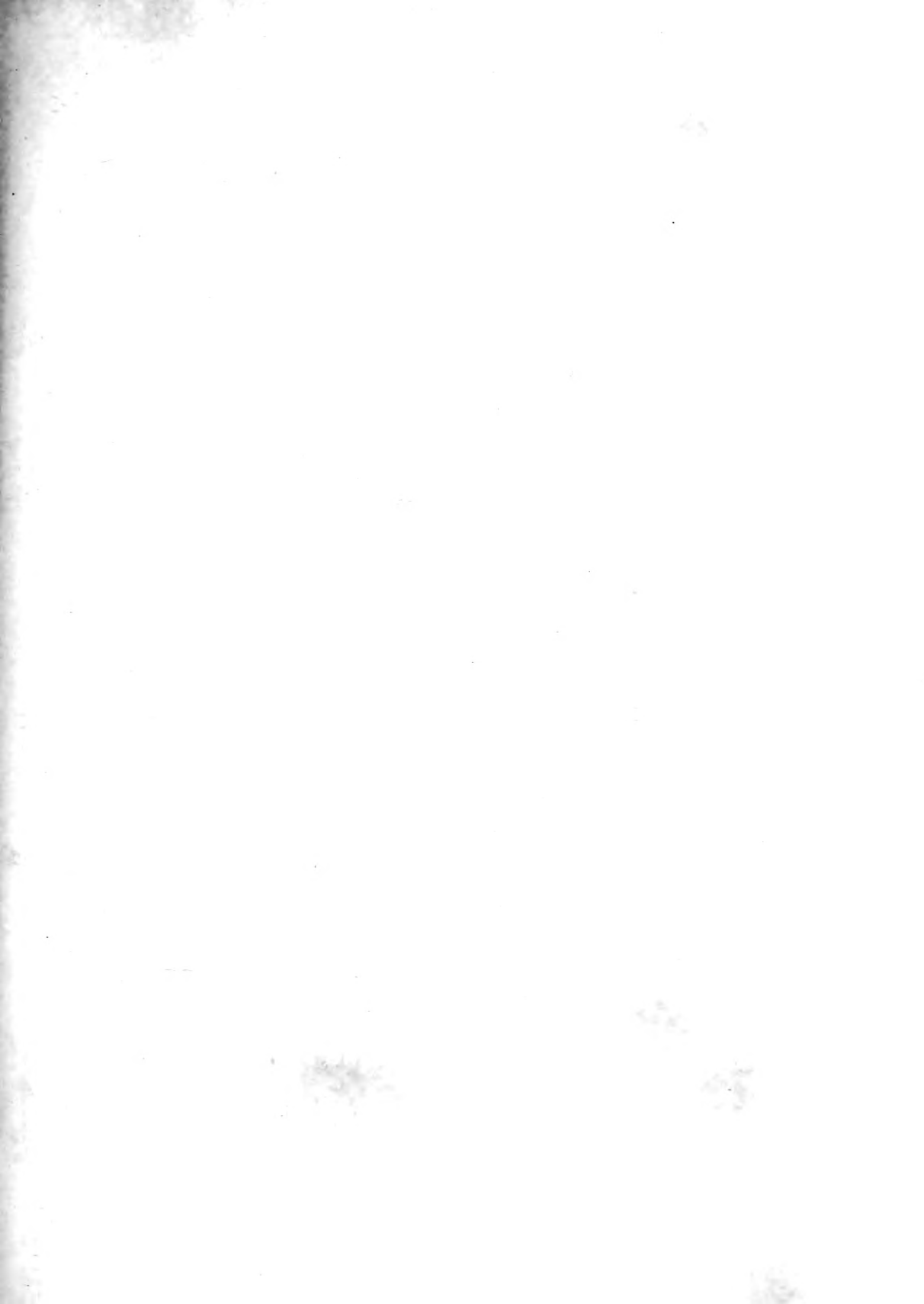
Round the old farm yonder, whose weather-stained roofs and walls half ruinous just show among its clustering trees, there is a picture of quiet autumn life. In the spacious stack-yard a party of labourers, whose sunburnt faces glow against the green background of the trees like so many round red autumn suns, are standing about a great waggon, tossing hay to men at work on the fast-growing ricks of new, sweet-smelling

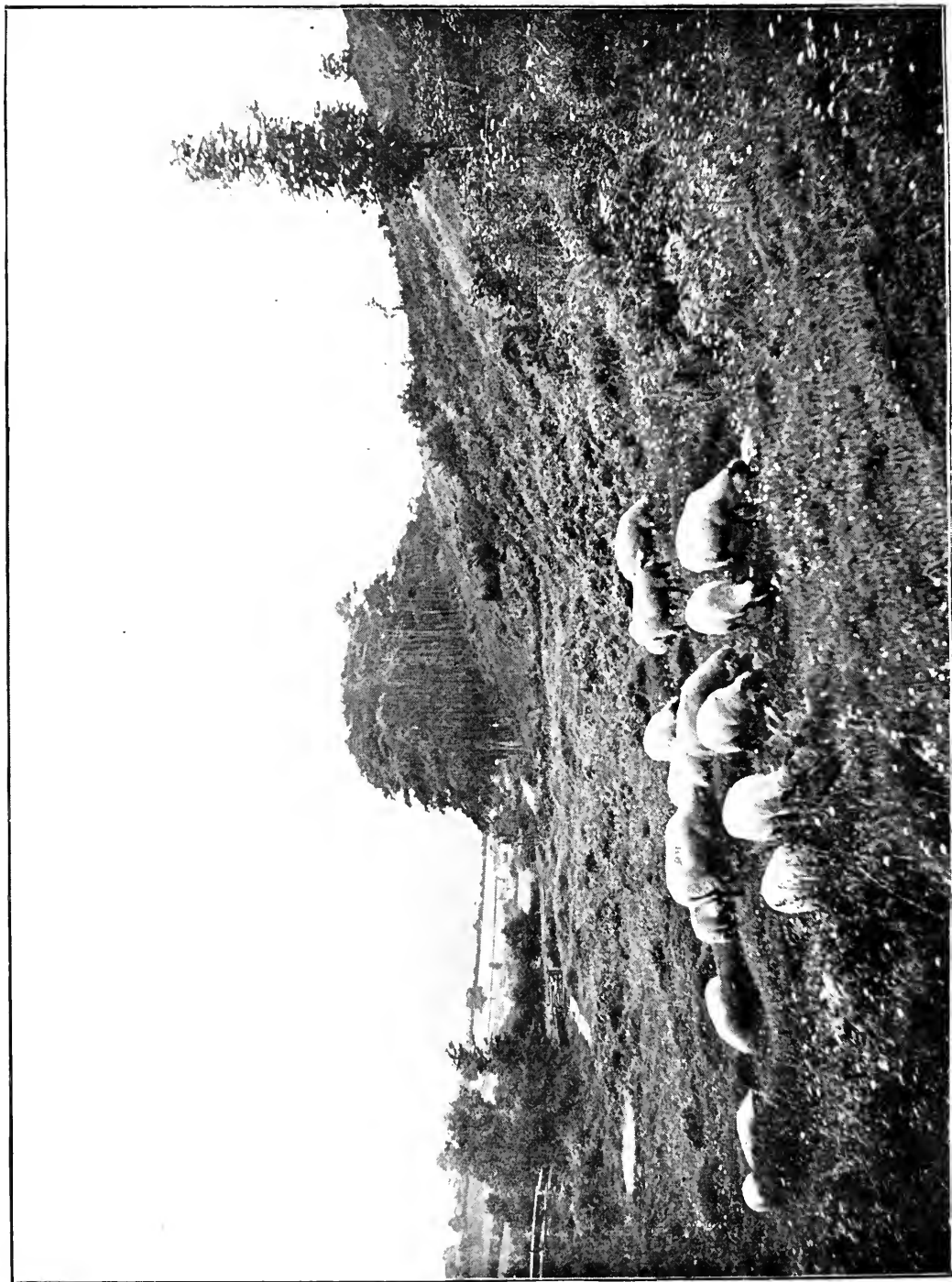
aftermath. It is an ancient homestead. A thousand summers, it may be, has hay been cleared from these broad meadows. A thousand times, at the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, have the sheaves been piled in this old stack-yard. The hamlet of three houses is little changed, either in name or character, since the days of Edward the Confessor, when Brictric held it, paying geld for one hide of land; when two villeins, with as many boors and serfs, made up all its scanty population. A pleasant place, this warm autumn afternoon, is the hollow at the back of the farm; a broad space of level grass land, once an orchard, and with a few forlorn old apple trees still standing in it; bordered on one side by a green lane, and on the other by a broken line of hedge-row, through whose wide gaps the thistles and brake-fern are marching down like caterans from the hills, bent on reconquering the pasture-land and turning it once more into a wilderness. All round it rise the hills, robbing it of some hours of sunshine indeed, yet sheltering it from every wind that blows. Just showing over a steep brow above are the white houses of a hill-side village, once in the heart of a great mining

field—the very place Macaulay had in view when he described how

“The rugged miners poured to war from Mendip’s sunless caves.”

The mines have long been deserted. But here and there among the villages you still may happen on some son of the soil, some time-worn and bent and wrinkled patriarch, who, in his young days, dug for ore among these hills; who remembers the time when a miner, working here for his own hand, could earn a sovereign a day. But although the miners have been gone these fifty years, the whole country side is seamed and scarred with traces of their old workings. There are fields on this farm where the ground is so broken with heaps of rubbish from the pits, and so full of barely-covered shafts, that the land is almost valueless. But there are no buildings to spoil the landscape. There was no machinery but the windlass and the bucket. And here, as ever, Nature has done her best to hide the traces of man’s ravages. The heaps of stone and earth she has changed to grassy knolls, covered them with lotus and burnet and scented clusters of the thyme, and scattered over them little clumps of dark campanula. Under her kindly touch the





WINTERHEAD: AN UPLAND PASTURE.

stony shafts are turned to bowery hollows, green with moss and stone-crop, and long plumes of fern.

A bird-haunted spot is this little hollow in the hills. The clump of old Scotch firs looking down from the hill-slope yonder is the harbour of crow and magpie, ever the hangers-on of a West Country farm. The straggling hedge-rows that part these broad fields are full of empty nests. Here, among the red fruit of rowan and whitebeam, the ring-ousel lingers on his southward journey. In this old apple tree, whose withered arms are hung for once with fruit, like little golden balls, is a woodpecker's hole, with marks of the maker's tool about it yet. That stately oak tree, springing straight and tall in the line of the old hedge-row—touched above with a hundred points of light where the pale green acorns hang, and laced below, across its drooping branches, with silver lines of gossamer—is a resting place for all the birds of the air. In the spring the cuckoo alights upon its topmost crown and calls his name to all the neighbourhood. From its leafy crest the magpie looks down, meditating another raid upon the hencoop. The brown squirrels too, love to frolic in its dim green shadows, playing hide and seek among the

branches, and racing headlong down its wrinkled bark to scamper over the short turf of the meadow. At this moment two linnets on its topmost spray are filling the air with such a chorus of sweet notes and breezy chattering that you might think a score of birds were in the tree.

The sun is sinking low. The shadows of the hedge-row elms are stealing far down the grassy slope. Sparrows that have been gleaning in outlying stubble-fields are flying home to roost in the ivy on the old barn wall, or in the sides of the stacks, or in snug tunnels that they have made for themselves in the thatched roof of their thankless lord and suzerain :—quarters infinitely cleaner and sweeter and more wholesome altogether than those of their smoke-blackened cousins in the city. The sun is down. A soft blue mist is gathering in the red heart of the pines. And now

“The shadows veil the meadows,
And the sunset’s golden ladders
Sink from twilight’s walls of grey.”



WOODSPRING: A GREY OLD HOUSE BY
THE SEA.

THE heat-glimmer is still quivering on the sand, and over the vast mud-flats, bared by the retreating tide, a soft haze hangs. Yet the sun, sinking slowly through a cloudless sky, reddens as it nears the low horizon, and the grey grass of the old sea wall is brightening in the glow of sunset. Over the long curve of the sand-hills shows a wide sweep of plain, whose level

meadows, freshened by the welcome rain, are still a very blaze of gold. Against the sky, where, at the far limit of the bay, the ragged hillocks die away into the shore, stands the white shaft of a lighthouse. Farther still, across the hazy mud-flats, rise the faint shapes of shadowy hills. The tide is out. A sea of boulders, shaggy with dark weed, look like a herd of strange monsters come ashore to bask upon the sand. There is no sign of human presence anywhere, save a house roof just showing here and there above the sand-hills, the distant hamlets scattered at far intervals over the moor, and the black stakes of fishing nets that stand out on the grey mud like webs of giant spiders. There is no figure on the shore, no stranded boat, no idle sail. Nor is there sound, save the low monotonous murmur of the sea. But here and there over the desolate expanse dark shapes of birds are moving. Now and then a troop of dunlins careers along the sand. Surely they are soon back after their brief northern summer. One can hardly think that they and the brown whimbrels whose musical trill at times falls softly on the ear can have been away at all. Now a party of gulls get up with wild stormy crying, and wheel and eddy in the air, now light, now dark on the grey sky

of the horizon. All the while to the cliff ledges overhead clamorous daws are drifting, passing to their nests, or settling on storm-worn pinnacles of rock. That shrill pipe was the cry of a kestrel. Two rock doves hurrying homeward, cliff-dwellers like the rest, pay no heed. They know him well, too well to fear at any time his beak or claw. Here he comes, wheeling round the headland. With wings and tail spread wide, he pauses a moment to hover in the air ; then sails slowly by. No shrill clamour from the cliff answers his challenge. No fierce young eyases yet are on the watch for his return. He alights on a ledge far overhead, where his mate no doubt is brooding on her rich brown eggs. Over the sea, trembling in the sinking sun, lies a gleam as of frosted silver. Suddenly, far out on the grey level, breaks a line of light. A faint sound falls on the ear—the low roar of the returning sea, the first wave of the rising tide. Now troops of daws, rising from the fields along the shore, fly homeward—a gathering cloud of dusky figures sweeping towards the cliff, that echoes with their musical clamour.

Right overhead they go, clustering like bees on ledges and pinnacles and grassy slopes, and

settle down to gossip over the experiences of the day. Again they rise into the air, and wheel over the sea, and again turn homeward, darkening the cliff as with innumerable points of shadow. Once more they rise in eddying crowd. The troop divides. With sharp chorus of farewell one party flies straight over the hill. Their resting-place is farther on. They are not dwellers in the cliff. They are making for the low hills to the northward, a ridge of limestone dwindling into such another rocky headland. There, in the shelter of the hills, stand the ruins of a priory, in the niches of whose crumbling tower, or on the dusty floor of its neglected belfry, their sires and they have built for generations their untidy nests. It is an ancient pile. Founded now nearly seven centuries ago, its grey walls harboured for three hundred years a handful of monks, black-stoled, black-hooded, darker even than these daws. It has long been an article of faith in the countryside that the old tower was

“ built
To purge de Traci's soul from guilt,
Of Becket foully slain.”

But in the original letter, still to be read in the

Cottonian library, in which William de Curtenai, grandson of Traci, made known to the Bishop of the diocese his intention of founding a "monastic house of the order of monks of St. Augustine," there is no hint at all of expiation. Nor, indeed, have we any evidence that the guilt of murder ever did lie heavy on de Traci's soul: though there is an old tradition that, after a brief re-appearance at Court, he spent the remainder of his stormy life in seclusion on his manor near Morthoe, where in the old churchyard by the sea

"Lie all the Tracies, with the wind in their faces."

The founder of the priory seems to have had no other object in view than "the welfare of the soul of Robert de Curtenai, my father, . . . and of my mother and myself; also of my wife, my ancestors and descendants." For rather more than three centuries the "Worspryng" canons, never probably more than ten in number, lived and died in this grey old house by the sea. We know little of their story; but the document is still in existence to which the last of their priors set his name in acknowledgment that the Pope was a usurper, and that King Henry alone was true head of the Church. Two years later all the

minor monasteries were forfeited to the Crown—"forasmoche as manifest synne, vicious, carnall and "abomynable lyving is dayly used and comitted "amonges the lytell Abbeyes and Pryories." This was one of the "lytell Pryories." Its revenues from all sources, whether from rents that were reckoned in horseshoes, or from "arable at *ivd.*," or from "wode and waste at *jd.* the acre," amounted to rather under a hundred a year.

When the little party of friars turned their backs upon their home, they appear to have carried with them what was probably the most sacred of their relics: one of those small wooden cups which, filled with "Canterbury Water"—that is, with water containing a minute quantity of the martyr's blood—were sold to visitors at Becket's shrine. Marvellous are the tales related by the chroniclers of the time as to the virtue of this wonderful water. By its use sight, hearing, speech, reason, and even life were restored.

The pavement was in fact still sprinkled with his blood when those supernatural manifestations began, which were to make the martyr's shrine the richest in the world. On the very day of the murder, a blind man on his way to seek aid at the church of St. Nicholas, was accosted by "an

“appearance in the form of a man, who warned
“him to betake himself to the new martyr of
“Christ.” He groped his way to Becket’s body.
He touched his own sightless eyes with the sacred
blood, and his vision was immediately restored.
This was the first of many miracles. The pious
chroniclers record how men, women, and children
flocked to the shrine from every corner of the
Kingdom, some to ask aid, others to return
thanks for favours granted: as Chaucer puts it:

“The holy, blisful martyr for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.”

Captives, who had been taken by the Saracens,
travelled all the way from Damascus, to return
thanks at the shrine of Canterbury, because St.
Thomas had appeared to them in the visions of
the night and helped them to escape.

Five writers of the time did their best to record
for the benefit of future ages the miracles of the
blessed martyr. These were Benedict, sometime
Prior of Christchurch, Canterbury, and afterwards
Abbot of Peterborough; William of Canterbury,
who, perhaps, held office at the shrine after
Benedict; Alan, Abbot of Tewkesbury; John of
Salisbury, who witnessed the murder, and whom

de Traci thought was the man he had wounded; and Grim of Cambridge,—not a monk, in all probability, nor really connected in any way with Becket, but his great admirer. It was Grim, it will be remembered, who was wounded in the vain attempt to save the Archbishop. The minutest particulars are given in these chronicles. The names and professions, the counties, the native towns of many of the pilgrims are recorded.

There are exceptions. In the case of a man who came from “the province of Surrey,” Benedict says “the barbarous name of the town has not “stuck in my memory.” The miracles were of every imaginable description. A sick monk, near Sedan, too ill to leave his cell, was touched with a mere list of the Saint’s achievements, and in a short time he was able to resume his duties. A monk of Byland was dying. He had already received the *Viaticum*, when the Abbot, having made the sign of the Cross in water upon a piece of Becket’s hair-shirt, caused the dying man’s mouth to be opened, and the water administered. Instantly, we are told, the sick man recovered speech and appetite. It was a common thing to promise a candle to the Saint. There were men

who were too ill to go in person to Canterbury, and who dated their recovery from the instant that the candle was lighted for them at the shrine.

There is a description of five widows who tried in vain to restore life to a child who had been three hours under water. They held him up by the feet; they repeated nine Paternosters over him in the name of the blessed St. Thomas, but all with no effect. Then one of them said to the child's mother: "Run and fetch a piece of string and "measure the child, and promise to the martyr a "candle of the same length." It was done, and the boy at once recovered.

The smallest offerings were not disdained. A Flemish bird-catcher, having tried in vain for some days to trap a certain falcon, cried out, "O "Blessed Thomas, glorious martyr, I will give "thee a penny if thou wilt give me the falcon." Benedict tells us that "it came instantly to the "bird-catcher, as if used to his hand. We both "saw the falcon," he goes on, "and received the "money."

Even more marvellous still are the legends that passed current as to the wonders wrought by the martyr's blood, which in quantities about the

bulk of a hazel nut, and largely diluted, were sold to pilgrims under the name of Canterbury Water. A man, journeying home after visiting the shrine, was belated at Rochester. In vain he sought shelter for the night. At door after door he was refused admittance. At last, "for the sake of the "blessed martyr," he was taken in. In the night the town caught fire. When the citizens were fleeing, panic-stricken, "the pilgrim, whose faith "was more fervent than the material flame, "remaining boldly on the roof, called for a spear, "or something long. A fork (hayfork, perhaps) "was handed up to him. Then, taking the "reliquary (containing Canterbury Water) from "his neck . . . he fastened it to the fork, "held it out towards the fire," and thus kept the flames at bay. For "the fire, as if fearing a "contrary element, turned aside." Finally the whole town was burnt, with the single exception of its one hospitable house.

A few drops of Canterbury Water swallowed or administered externally sufficed to cure the most desperate diseases, and were quite as efficacious as the pilgrimage itself. By its use the blind, the deaf, the lame, the palsied, were cured, and even the dead brought back to life.

The precious liquid was sold at first in small wooden vessels, fitted with lids, in which mirrors were sometimes fixed, "*specula mulierum*," as the monkish writer puts it. But as the wood was apt to split, flasks of lead or earthenware were used instead. These were hung from the neck, and came to be regarded, like the palm branch of Jerusalem or the escalop shell of Compostella, as an emblem of the pilgrimage. It was not an uncommon practice, in old days, to place in a martyr's tomb a small vessel filled with his blood. Many such have been discovered in the Catacombs. In the Kircher Museum at Rome there is an agate cup, containing the remains of blood, which was found in the Catacombs of St. Callixtus.

A special point of interest attaches to these legends in that there is reason to think that one of these very reliquaries, one of the earliest and most primitive form and still actually containing traces of blood, has been preserved to the present day. Forty years ago, or rather more—the actual date was 1849—some workmen, while repairing the interior of a little West Country church, at Kewstoke in Somersetshire, had occasion to remove an old carved stone, which had

been built into the masonry. It was apparently the head of a column, worked in Caen stone, a material not used elsewhere in the building, and the style was earlier than anything else in the church.

In front of this capital is a niche enclosing a battered effigy, apparently the half length figure of a veiled woman. At the back, where it was embedded in the wall, is an arched cavity, about eight inches high, closed by an oaken panel, and containing a small cylindrical wooden vessel, three inches in diameter, and but slightly more in height, broken and decayed, and containing at the bottom a layer of some dark substance, pronounced, after careful examination, to be the remains of blood. It is a bold guess, but still a guess that has much to support it, that this cup was one of the very reliquaries dispersed through the country after Becket's martyrdom; that it once held no less precious a relic than "Canterbury Water"; in short, that the dark layer at the bottom is what passed, seven centuries ago, for the blood of the blessed St. Thomas himself.

The monastery is now a dwelling-house. The windows of a modern farm look out through the

walled-up arches of the priory. Quaint gargoyles peer through the mantling creepers of the ruined cloister. Grey stems of ivy have sapped right through the crumbling masonry. Wallflowers bloom on the worn crowns of the turrets. It is a quiet spot, "here, at the farthest limit of the "world." Yet it is not strange that a corner so remote should have been chosen for the site of a monastery dedicated "to God, the blessed Mary, "and the blessed Martyr Thomas." All four of Becket's murderers were men of the West Country.

De Brito and Fitzurse were landowners of this district; De Traci and De Morville belonged, at farthest, to the neighbouring county. This crumbling relic is to us but an item on the shelf of a museum. The great churchman himself is to most of us nothing but a name, a mere figure in a page of history. And although poet and player, past and present masters of their art, have done their best to bring him again before the world; although his counterfeit presentment stands to-day before us as full of fire, of valour, of resolute determination as on that fatal Tuesday more than seven centuries ago—yet the Becket of the players is but "a fable, a phantom, a

“show.’ When the curtain falls upon that last sad scene, we are conscious of no sinking of heart at the remembrance of an awful figure lying white and still upon the bloodstained pavement. The curtain down, our Becket is alive again. The actor lives, the martyr is forgotten.

There is another figure in the play whose memory lingers in this far-off spot. At the foot of the low blue hills yonder lies the village which was the ancient home of the Cliffords.

Rosamund herself,—the fair girl over whose tomb at Godstow her royal lover wrote—

“Hic jacet in tumba Rosa mundi non Rosa munda,”

was born almost within sight of Curtenai’s tower. When the fair fugitive pleaded, in excuse for wandering out unguarded, that

“ . . . there stole into the city a breath
Full of the meadows,”

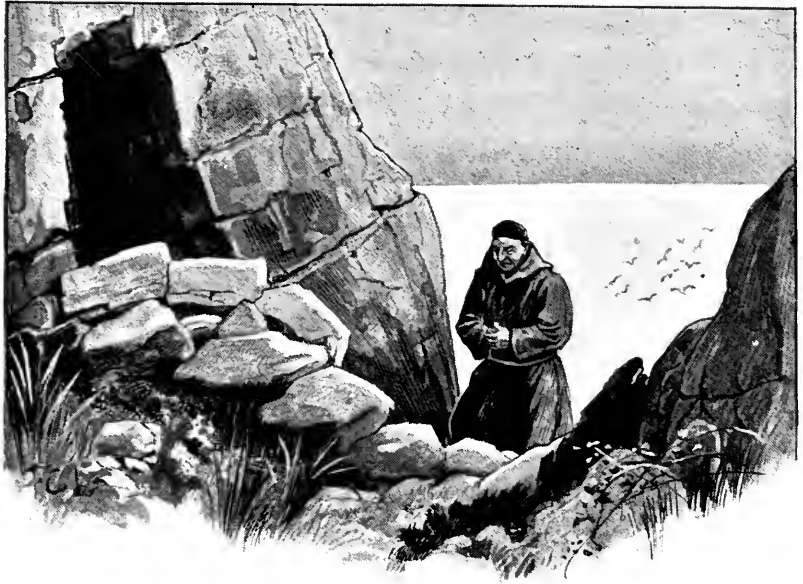
she was, it may be, thinking of the hamlet where, in quiet cloisters, long since gone to ruin, she passed her girlish days. There by the

“ . . . river, widening through the meadows green,
To the vast sea, so near and yet unseen,”

A Grey Old House by the Sea. 249

there may have come to her in vision some
glimmer of the coming time, some forerunning
shadow of the

“Love that is born of the deep, coming up with the sun from
the sea.”



KEWSTOKE: THE MONK'S STEPS.

A GREY November day, with sad-coloured clouds hanging low over a grey and sullen sea. At intervals there rolls across the water the dull boom of distant fog-guns, echoing like thunder under the heavy veil of mist. From the shore below comes the ceaseless fret of waves sweeping swiftly in across the sand. Along the edge of the tide and over the wide mud-flats are scattered the white figures of gulls; and at times there comes faintly up the low musical call of a whimbrel, or the plaintive wail of a curlew. At

times, too, there rises in the air a great flock of sandpipers, like a thin smoke-cloud drifting down the shore, until, as they wheel, their snowy breasts and upturned wings gleam for a moment silver white on the grey sky behind them.

It is a grey world altogether; grey sea, grey shore, grey shingle. Grey, too, are the ragged sand hills, whose shifting ramparts the gales of many winters have piled so high over the old sea wall. Below this hollow—a narrow gorge worn deep into the hill—there lies a little hamlet, still half-hidden by the trees, thinned and tattered though they are, and nestling close under the shelter of the hill;—a score or so of white-walled houses, with roofs of red tiles weathered to soft shades of brown and russet, with plumes of blue smoke all trailing seawards, and with a fringe of orchards round it, where the mellow fruit is still glowing on the boughs. High over the roofs of the village rises the grey tower of the church, its turrets just clear above the clustering elms, in whose shadow lies the crowded graveyard,

“Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap.”

A wide stretch of pasture-land divides the village from the sea. Yet, in old days—before the coming of the friars to the priory yonder, whose tower shows faintly against the low green hill that dies in a rocky headland by the sea, perhaps even before the legionaries stormed the great stronghold whose ruins crown this breezy hill-top—the little hamlet, now so far above the tide line, was, if antiquaries read its name aright, a place of boats. The fields about it are still below high-water mark. A high spring tide, before a gale from the westward, would even now reach right up to the village, were it not for the sea wall and the sand hills.

The sand hills are mere desert now. Yet they are pleasant enough in the summer time, when their short turf is bright with rest-harrow and crowfoot, when the great bells of the sea-convolvulus open wide on the hot sand, when tufts of pale thrift blossom in the shingle, and clumps of white campion, and frail flowers of yellow poppy. Pleasant then is the sweet breath of thyme and clover. Pleasanter still the smell of the sea, blown by soft summer airs over the wide mud-flats and the trampled sand.

The little hamlet, high and dry this many a

day, is a port no longer. The only harvest of the sea that the villagers can glean in our time is that which wind and wave bring ashore upon this sandy beach. In the broken spars, the splintered timbers, the nameless waifs and strays of wreckage which the storm brings to their doors, the dwellers in the cottages that seem to crouch for shelter behind the old sea wall, find all their winter fuel.

There are traditions that many a cargo of spirits was run ashore here in smuggling days. Tales are still current of the hiding places where the goods were stored. It is said that even the church tower has in its time afforded sanctuary to bales of lace and kegs of liquor that never paid the King his due. This narrow pass may well have served the "free-traders" as a secret way into the hills.

But the long flight of rude stone steps that leads down it towards the village dates from an earlier time. To its use and history no clue remains. It is likely enough that it was the pathway to the camp from the long-vanished port below.

There is a legend in the country-side that it led up to the cell of an anchorite, a solitary who

inhabited this ravine, and who, with his own hands, hewed and fitted the stones of the old stairway, now worn smooth by the feet of many centuries. Half-way up the pass, under the shelter of the limestone cliff, is his traditional dwelling place, a chamber hollowed in the living rock and roughly faced with masonry.

Who was he? A monk from the old priory yonder,—an outlaw with blood upon his soul?

“Had you, Father, hid away
In your heart, some load to bury,
That you chose so long to stay,
World-forgot and solitary?”

It is a quiet spot. The crumbling walls look down through the rocky gateway of the gorge to the village at its foot; over the grey curve of shingle to the wet sands that, as the cloud veil lifts and scatters, are beginning now to shine like silver in the sunlight; to the grey sea, with sails showing ghost-like here and there; to the far shore, whose rugged outline looms faintly through the haze.

The brown elms of the village redden in the sunshine. There is a flush of colour on the belfry walls, on the limestone battlements above

the pass, on the worn steps of the old stairway winding downward to the sea.

Yes, a quiet spot. There is no sound but the slumbrous music of the waves, at times the bark of a sheep-dog, a cattle-call from distant meadows, or the chatter of linnets on the hill.

On such a scene the old monk looked down. Such sounds were in his ears. Such rest and calm brooded over his rude dwelling—beast and bird his sole companions, the busy world shut out.

Was he the Father of the village, summoned from his cell to shrieve the dying, bless the dead? Was he a surly recluse, fond of solitude and silence?

“Tell, when all the boughs were bare,
Did you dread each dreary waking?
Hewing out your stony stair,
Were you glad at thorn-buds breaking?

Did you mark the flashing white
On the breast of earliest swallows,
Or the wavering, yellow light
On the cowslips in the hollows?

As day grew 'twixt dawn and dark
Did the shy birds learn to love you?
Sang the silver-throated lark
Out of sight in skies above you?

When the burning noontide sun
Made the gorge grow hot and hazy
Did you wish your work were done?
Were you ever tired—or lazy?

When you sat beside your door
In the dusk, you ancient man, you,
Did the broad-leaved sycamore
Wave and rustle low to fan you?

Did you sometimes, in the night,
Rise and quit your quiet shieling,
Climbing up the grassy height
With a still, expectant feeling?

Where the wind went whispering by
Underneath pale stars that glisten,
From the open, upper sky
Did God speak, and did you listen?"

From the rocky brow above the hermit's chamber
the eye looks out over a wider world. A world
no longer cold and colourless. The clouds have
lifted from the sea; the sky has cleared; a flood
of sunshine covers the whole landscape. It
kindles on the red roofs of the village, it gilds the
sombre leafage of the elms, it brightens the green
meadows, turning all their straight-cut waterways
to lines of silver. A tall beech that lifts its
stately head above its fellows in the wood yonder
reddens in the sunset. And the bright foliage of
a row of Spanish chestnuts along the path that

Kewstoke: The Monk's Steps. 257

winds upwards from the shore flames like a river of light among the quiet-coloured elms and larches. A passing sail gleams white upon an opal sea. Over the wide west is spread a soft and golden glow; while far hills, range beyond range, are wrought in amethyst upon the lighted sky.



BY COACH TO TINTAGEL.

THE traveller from Clovelly, making his way by coach towards the northern coast of Cornwall, pays no slight penalty, in the early stages of his ride at any rate, for the ease and comfort of his journey. It is but a dull and featureless road that crosses the miles of wind-swept moorland which fill so wide a stretch of the Devonshire marches. We have to leave

unseen some of the grandest coast scenery in the county. We miss altogether the pleasant Vale of Hartland and the precipitous rocks of Black Mouth; and, above all, we see nothing of the world-forgotten nook of Hartland Quay, nestling close under its mighty wall of cliff.

It is a pleasant mode of travelling. There is a much greater charm about the box-seat of a coach than there is in the cosiest corner of a railway carriage. There is the charm of freshness and the open air, of hills and meadows and deep country lanes. But a man on a coach is not entirely his own master. The coach-ride gives no opportunity for anything like a leisurely survey. There is little time for exploring church or manor-house or abbey ruin. The old encampment, the cluster of grave-mounds, or the ancient cross of which perhaps the traveller may have caught a glimpse in passing, appeals to him in vain.

Morwenstow is among the spots we have to pass unseen. Yet it is well worth a pilgrimage. No picture, either of pen or pencil, can give a fair idea of that grey old tower by the sea, among its gnarled and storm-beaten trees, and set round with old figure-heads,—the sorrowful memorials

of lost ships and of drowned mariners. And as at Clovelly, Kingsley is the central figure of all legends, old or new, so Morwenstow is haunted by memories of Hawker, for forty years the Vicar of the parish. He left his mark there in many ways. He built the vicarage, and above the vicarage door he traced these lines :—

“ A house, a glebe, a pound a day,
A pleasant place to watch and pray.
Be true to Church, be kind to poor
O minister for evermore.”

Morwenstow we have to take on trust. But the coach goes through Kilkhampton, and here again it is the Church that is the centre of interest. Outside the old grey walls we are reminded of Hervey, sometime curate in Bideford, who in this quiet churchyard wrote his once famous *Meditations*. Within the building lie the ashes of a line of Grenvilles;—the greatest of them, indeed, rests not here, but somewhere in the Spanish Main. One monument is in memory of Sir Beville Grenville, who, after routing on Stamford Hill a Roundhead army twice as numerous as his own, was killed, a few weeks later, in the fight on Lansdowne. The field of

battle is only four miles to the southward; and there, on the wall of the village inn, may still be seen this inscription, from the monument,—long since destroyed,—which was set up on the scene of conflict:—

“ In this Place
Ye Army of ye Rebels under ye command of
ye Earl of Stamford
Received a signal Overthrow by the Valor
Of Sir Bevill Grenville and ye Cornish Army,
On Tuesday, ye 16th of May, 1643.”

As we drove out of Kilkhampton a brilliant sunset was flaming in the west, and the shadow of the coast was strangely lengthened on the grassy fringes of the road. By the time we had entered on the last league of the journey, the air, that all day long had been sweetened by the breath of wide sheets of gorse and heather, was blowing cool across the moors. And as we slowly descended the long hill to Bude, darkness was fairly settling down over the landscape.

Morning broke almost without a cloud. It was still summer, but there was a sign of coming change in the great flights of swallows that had assembled in the village street, clustering in thousands on roofs and telegraph wires, as if

pausing for rest, or waiting until some coming storm should be overpast.

The sea was in quiet mood as we stood on the grassy brow of the cliff that skirts the shore; and they were the very gentlest of waves that rolled lazily in across the shining sand. But on every side there were tokens, only too plain to read, that this is among the most perilous of shores. Here a party of men were breaking up the iron frame-work of a wreck. There the life-boat crew, cleaning and painting and overhauling, stood ready by their gear. In many of the gardens by the canal are the battered figure-heads of ships, half hidden among shrubs and flowers. And in the churchyard above the village the white effigy of a turbaned warrior that once looked proudly down from the bows of the *Bencoolen*, now guards the grave of thirteen of her crew, lost when she came ashore here on these smooth sands some five-and-thirty years ago. In one of the houses of the village are preserved some arms—cutlases and muskets—that have been recovered from the wreck, so corroded and so encrusted with sand that their original shapes are hardly recognizable.

The sun went down behind an ominous-looking bank of cloud. That night the wind roared in

the chimneys of the inn, and clouds of driving sand rattled like shot against the windows. Next morning found the sea in another temper altogether. Great green rollers were thundering up the beach, and leaping over the break-water in sheets of spray. Heavy clouds were rolling up from the southward, and altogether it was sufficiently clear that the swallows were well advised to put in for calmer weather.

The day's ride began under no pleasant conditions. Cold squalls of pitiless rain drove fiercely in our faces as we sat huddled together on the coach, glad to make use of every wrap and rug we had, and forcibly reminded of the old fisherman, who surveying the prostrate forms of his party of holiday makers, lying helpless in the boat, overcome by dire extremity of sickness, muttered softly to himself: "And they calls this 'goin' a-pleasurin!'"

But the sun came out again as we went down the long slope into Boscastle; and, at length, when we drew up before the inn, the sky was clear. But the wind was blowing harder than ever as we made our way along the strange little harbour; and by the look-out station on the cliff it was as much as we could do to hold our own

against the gale. A tremendous sea was breaking on the reefs outside, and thundering against the rocky wall below. Before us, far as eye could reach, stretched away the sunlit levels of the Atlantic, touched with a thousand twinkling points of light, and shot with changing tones of green and blue and amethyst.

Boscastle Minster lies in an ideal setting in its quiet woodland valley. But some travellers, at any rate, will look with less interest on its massive walls, on the decorated timbers of its noble roof, or on the time-blackened carvings of its beautiful bench-ends, than on the other church of Boscastle, at Forrabury, a mile or so to the westward. For this is the Silent Tower of Bottreaux, whose bells lie at the bottom of the sea, just outside the harbour.

All the world knows the story. How, when the church was first built, the village folk petitioned the Lord of Bottreaux for a peal of bells to hang in the new tower. How the bells were cast, and were on their way by sea from London. How, as the ship drew near Boscastle harbour, the pilot, a Tintagel man, heard the chimes of his own village ringing, and thanked God for fine weather and a prosperous voyage.

How the captain scoffed: "Thank your own skill," said he, "and our stout craft and able seamanship." How the words were hardly uttered, when a sudden storm caught the vessel and dashed her to pieces on the rocks. How only the pilot reached land alive. And how, on wild nights of winter, when a storm is coming up from the Atlantic, the fisherman on the shore still hears the muffled tones of the long-lost Bottreaux bells, as the unquiet surges swing them in their ocean rest.

But the glory of the whole coast is Tintagel,—the birth-place of Arthur, the palace of King Marc of Cornwall. Though the village of Tintagel is half a mile or more inland, the ruins of the ancient stronghold stand partly on the brink of a cliff that overhangs the sea, but mainly on a bold headland almost surrounded by the waves. Some of the masonry is older even than the days of the Round Table, for in St. Juliet's Chapel there are, it is said, traces of Roman workmanship. Tintagel was still inhabited, either as a fortress or a prison until early Tudor times; but Leland describes it as having wholly gone to ruin. "It hath bene," he says in his gossiping *Itinerary*, "a marvelous strong and notable forteres, and

“almost *situ loci inexpugnabile*, especially for the
“donjon that is on the great high terrible cragge.
“But the residue of the buildinges of the castel
“be sore wether-beten an yn ruine.”

Standing on the brink of the tremendous cliff, with the waves and the wave-girt rock before, with the wind-swept downs behind, where the lonely church seems to crouch upon the short turf like a storm-driven sea-bird, and with the whole air full of the fretful murmur of the sea, we look down upon a page of old romance.

His must be a dull soul who, when the stern lines of the headland are dark against the glowing west, cannot people the old halls with shadowy figures, with the shapes of Arthur and his Knights, who, more than all other heroes, have been so

“Magnified by the purple mist
The dusk of centuries and of song.”

As we look over the perilous verge we have no eyes for the dark hues of the rock, for the whiteness of the leaping foam-cloud, or for the beauty of the blue levels of “the unquiet, bright Atlantic
“main.” We have no ears for the croak of the raven, or the wail of the herring-gull, or even for

the thunder of the sea. Our souls are with the past. As we climb the steep pathway to the summit of the headland, we think of Uther Pendragon and of Merlin. We see Sir Bedivere stooping beneath his burden. We hear the clink of

“ . . . harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms,”

when

“ all to left and right
The bare, black cliff clanged round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armèd heels.”

We see in fancy the prostrate figure of the guilty queen. We see

“Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship
Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire.”

We hear the shock of that last battle in the west when

“ friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle.”

And when at length we stand within the wind-swept ruin we remember that it was here King Marc of Cornwall kept his court. It was to this

sea-girt rock that Tristram of Lyonesse, the peerless hunter, harper, knight, brought home his master's bride, Iseult of Ireland. Within these very walls stood the two helpless, hapless lovers, caught all unaware in the fatal mesh of the enchanter. For among the treasures on board the ship that brought them to Tintagel was a golden cup, with a love-potion in it, prepared by the bride's mother, for Iseult and King Marc to drink upon their marriage day, "and for ever love each "other."

But, alas, Iseult and Sir Tristram, in all innocence, drained the magic cup. The subtle potion fired their veins ;

“ their hands
Tremble, and their cheeks are flame
As they feel the fatal bands
Of a love they dare not name.”

In fancy we see that other chamber, far off upon the coast of Brittany, where, after long years the Knight lay dying. We see him

“ weak and pale,
Though the locks are yet brown on his noble head,
Propt on pillows on his bed,
Gazing sea-ward for the light
Of some ship that fights the gale
On this wild December night.”

We see Iseult standing in the moonlight, the
spray of the sea-voyage on her cloak and hair.
We hear her singing, in sweet voice and low,
the promised

“ . . . tales of true, long-parted lovers,
Joined at evening of their days again.”

We catch the last low murmur of the dying
Knight:—

“Now to sail the seas of Death I leave thee—
One last kiss upon the living shore.”

*Printed at the Office of the Publisher,
St. Stephen Street, Bristol.*







